

Highland Cousins

William Black



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HIGHLAND COUSINS

A NOVEL

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

AUTHOR OF

“A PRINCESS OF THULE,” “MACLEOD OF DARE,” ETC., ETC

FOURTH THOUSAND.

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HIGHLAND COUSINS.



CHAPTER I.

A CONVOY.

AWAY out at the edge of the world, facing the wild Atlantic seas, a small and black procession was striving hard to make headway against a blinding gale of rain and sleet. First came a horse and cart, and in the cart was a young woman, seated on a sack of straw, and wrapped up in a thick blue-green tartan shawl that in a measure protected her from the driving gusts; then followed a straggling company of middle-aged men, their figures pitched forward against the wind, their teeth clenched, the salt spindrift dripping from shaggy eyebrows and beard, while now and again the tail-end of a plaid, escaping from the clutch of frozen fingers, would go flying aloft in the air. Occasionally one of the men, from mere force of habit, would stop for a moment to try to light his pipe; but even if his horny palms were sufficient to shelter the sulphur match, the wet tobacco would not burn, and the pipe was mechanically returned to its owner's pocket. There were two or three colliers, trotting by the side of their respective masters; but what with the drenching showers and the bewilderment of the tumultuous waves, there was not a snap or a snarl left amongst them.

At length, however, the road the travellers were following, which hitherto had wound along the shore, struck inland; and at this corner stood a solitary and dismal-looking habitation. There was no sign of any kind to

denote that here was offered entertainment for either man or beast ; but no doubt the company knew the place ; for as with one accord they left the highway and thronged into the narrow passage, pressing and jostling against each other. All of them, that is to say, except one—an elderly man, of respectable appearance, who seemed to hesitate about leaving the girl in the cart.

“Will you not come down, Barbara,” said he, addressing her in the Gaelic tongue, “and step into the house ?”

The young girl with the dark-blue Highland eyes and raven-black hair merely shook her head.

“Then will I bring you out a dram,” said he, “or a piece of oatcake and cheese ?”

“I am not wishing for anything,” she answered, also speaking in Gaelic ; and thereupon the elderly shepherd, considering himself relieved of present responsibility, followed his companions into the inn.

Apparently it was but a cold welcome they had received. There seemed to be no one about ; nor was there any fire in the grate of this bare, damp-smelling, comfortless chamber into which they had crowded themselves. But they did not appear to mind much ; all the pent-up speech suppressed by the storm had now broken loose ; and there was a confused and high-surfing babblement about funeral expenses—arrears of rent—the sale of stock—the intentions of the factor—and what not ; all of them talking at once, and at cross-purposes ; contradicting, asseverating, with renewed striking of matches and sucking of difficult pipes. Indeed, so vehement and vociferous was the hubbub that when a timid-looking young lass of about fourteen came along, bearing before her a shovel-full of burning peats, she could hardly win attention, until one of them called out—

“Make way for the lass there ! Come in, Isabel. And where is your mother and the whiskey ?”

“My mother is not so well to-day,” the girl replied, as she put the peats in the grate.

“But you can get us the whiskey ?” was the instant and anxious inquiry.

“Oh, yes, indeed.”

“Then make haste and bring it to us, for there is more

warmth in a glass of whiskey than in all the peats in the island."

"And have you any oateake in the house?" asked another.

"No, there is no oateake in the house," the lass made answer. "It is at this very moment that my grandmother is baking."

She left the room, and shortly returned with a tray on which were ranged a number of thick tumblers and measures, the latter filled with a dull straw-coloured fluid; whereupon each man apportioned his own and paid for the same. There was no drinking of healths, for they had come away from a solemn occasion; but this additional stimulant, following previous and liberal potations, awoke a fresh enthusiasm of eager speech—about pasture land and arable, the Crofters' Commission, the price of calves, and similar things. And perhaps it was to rebuke them that Lauchlan MacIntyre the shoemaker, a tall gaunt man of melancholy mien, pushed his way through and placed his fist on the table, the better to steady himself.

"A shame it is," he said, in Gaelic that might have been fluent if it had not been interrupted by apprehensions of hiccough—"A shame it is—that we should be talking of such worldly matters. Ay, ay, indeed, when we should be mourning with our friend—mourning—as Rachel—mourning, and refusing to be comforted. It is this day that my heart is sore for Donald Maclean—that has seen the last of his family put away from him into the earth. A fine lass she was—ay, ay, indeed, not a handsomer in these islands—and a handy and a useful creature about the croft; but we are as the grass that perisheth and the flower that withereth; and Donald—Donald will be a sorrowful man—when he finds himself among the folk of Duntroone—so that the saying will be fulfilled that was written: 'Sad is—the lowing—of a cow—on a strange pasture'—"

He tilted forward: but he did not fall; for a powerful pair of hands had got hold of him by the shoulders, and he was dragged away from the table, and thrown unceremoniously into a corner. The elderly shepherd, who had thus interfered, and who was about the only one of them with

any remaining pretensions to sobriety, now addressed him with bitter scorn :

" Yes, you are the fine man to have your wits and judgment in such a state. You do not know that it is Donald Maclean that we have been burying ; you do not know that his daughter is alive and well, and waiting for us outside in the cart ; you do not know it is she who is going to Duntroone. And you are the fine man to have the charge of her : sure I am you will be in a drunken sleep as soon as you get on board the steamer——"

" Let be—let be," said Lauchlan, fumbling in his pocket for his pipe. " I am not for quarrelling. I am a peaceable man. Duncan, have you a match ?"

" A match !" exclaimed the other, with disdain. " Is it nothing you can think of but whiskey and tobacco ?——"

" Whiskey ?" repeated Lauchlan, with an amazing alertness. " Well, now, it is your head that has the good sense in it, Duncan, sometimes—and that is the Bible's truth. And I say what you say ; another good glass of whiskey will do us no harm, since we have to walk across the island to Kilree. Oh, yes, do not fear ; I will look after the young lass and her father ; I will take them safely to Duntroone. Have you a match, Duncan ?"

The older man did not answer.

" It is I that must try to get a glass of milk for Barbara," he said to himself, as he moved away, " if there is no oatcake in the house."

But meanwhile Lauchlan—long Lauchlan the shoemaker he was called in Duntroone on the mainland—Lauchie, while fumbling about for his pipe, had come upon a Jew's-harp ; and this was a new inspiration. With heroic endeavour he struggled to his feet ; he balanced himself ; he placed the instrument to his lips ; and began to play, in a thin, quavering strain, ' Lord Lovat's Lament.' Nay, he affected to give himself something of the airs of a piper ; in the limited space at his command, he paced backwards and forwards, with slow and solemn steps ; there was an inward look on his face, as if he was forgetful, or disdainful, of these vain roysterers. Moreover, there was a kind of nebulous grandeur about the tall and melancholy figure ; for since ever the peats had been put in the grate, the wind

had been steadily blowing down the chimney, and now the apartment was thick with smoke—peat-smoke and tobacco-smoke combined; so that the performer, with his slow, funereal steps of about three inches in length, was as the dark ghost of a piper, moving to and fro unheeded and apart. And he might very well have been left to his harmless diversion; but that was not to be. In spite of the din, the tremulous, wiry sound of the Jew's-harp had caught the ear of a huge red-bearded drover from Mull who was on the other side of the table; and for some reason or another he became irritated.

"You there, Long Lanchlan," he called, "why do you play that foolish thing? If the Free Church will not let you play the pipes, a man who is a man at all would refuse to play on any instrument! It is the great piper you are—with a child's toy at your mouth!"

The piper—or harper, rather—paused, advanced to the table, steadied himself, and fixed his gaze on his enemy.

"What—is it you say—about the Free Church?" he demanded, with his small black eyes beginning to glitter.

"This it is I am saying," responded the big red-bearded giant, with his brows lowering ominously, "that when the Free Church will be for putting down the pipes throughout the islands, then the man is not a man, but a dog every inch of him, who will give up the pipes and take in the place of the pipes what is allowed him, and that is the low, pitiful, vile toy-instrument you have there."

"Then you are a liar," said the shoemaker, with decision.

"I am a liar?" repeated the other in an access of fury. "But you are worse, for you are a son of the devil and a liar besides—and I will smash your d——d Free Church toy!"

He made a sudden snatch across the table, caught the Jew's-harp out of the shoemaker's hand, and dashed it on the floor, dancing on it with his heavy-nailed boots. Then the tumult began. The shoemaker would get round the table. His friends held him back. He broke away, with imprecations, and howls of rage. The drover—Red Murdoch—equally frantic, was desperately striving to dispossess himself of those who clung to him or who bravely

interposed themselves between the two combatants ; while random blows on both sides did nothing worse, so far, than beat the air. But what portended evil was that the angry passions thus aroused showed a tendency to become general. There were excited cries and remonstrances—the invariable prelude of a faction fight. And then, as it chanced, by some accidental swaying of the crowd, the table went over—went over with a *breege* fit to wake the dead : the tray, the glasses, the measures, the unnecessary water-bottle hurling themselves into the little black fire-place.

It was in the midst of all this indescribable uproar that a new figure suddenly appeared on the scene—an old woman with unkempt silver-white locks and visage of terrible import. She came in quickly ; she was armed with the rolling-pin she had been using at the bake-board ; and with some strange sort of instinct she seemed to make straight for the two chief offenders.

“What is this, now,” she exclaimed, in shrill Gaelic, “what is this going on, and my daughter lying ill ! Out with you, you drunken savages ! Out of the house with you, you heathen crew !—ay, every one of you !—out of the house with you !—out !—out !—” And these panting ejaculations were accompanied by strokes so energetic and unexpected that a universal bewilderment and confusion instantly prevailed. No man’s person, nor any part of it, however inferior, was safe from this merciless weapon ; though it was mainly on the Mull drover and on the astonished shoemaker that her valiant belabouring fell.

“In the name of God, woman, have peace !” cried one of them.

But there was no peace—there was war—war implacable and ferocious—war that ended in a decisive victory ; for in an incredibly short space of time she had driven forth the whole invertebrate crowd of them, and slammed-to the outer door. They found themselves in the rain, they hardly knew how or why. They regarded each other, as if something had occurred, that they were trying to recollect. Then their eyes fell upon the cart. The young lass was still patiently waiting there, the thick blue-green shawl not entirely confining the tags of raven-black hair that had been loosened by the storm. And then Duncan the

shepherd—choosing to ignore this wild thing that had just happened—said discreetly :

“We’d better be getting on, lads. It would be a great pity if we were to miss the *Sanda*.”

They now followed the road that cut across the island ; and a dismal road it was—leading through sombre wastes of swampy peat-moss and half-frozen tarns ; with rarely a symptom of life anywhere, except the occasional clanging-by overhead of a string of wild-swans on their way to the western seas. But at any rate the rain had stopped ; and the wind, instead of being dead ahead, was now on their quarter, as a sailor might say ; so that they made very good progress—Lanchie the shoemaker clinging on to the tail-end of the cart, and talking to himself the while.

As the day waned, of a sudden they encountered the strangest sound—a long-protracted wail that rose and fell, as if it were some spirit of the dusk in immeasurable pain.

“May the Good Being save us, but what is that !” was the pious ejaculation of one of the company.

Lanchie, holding on to the cart, and still talking to himself, laughed and chuckled.

“Oh, you are the clever boys, and no mistake !” he said, without looking at them. “You are the clever ones, that would squeeze paraffin oil out of the peat ; and you would make your own sheep-dip ; and you would write to the Queen complaining of the Commission and the rents. And yet you do not know the new steam-whistle—you have never heard the siren steam-whistle before—and the *Sanda* has given you a splendid fright !—”

“The *Sanda* !” exclaimed a neighbour in dismay, and inadvertently he relapsed into English. “Is she *unn* ?”

“Ay, she’s *unn*,” responded Lanchie, giggling to himself, “and very soon she’ll be off again, and we’ll hef to tek Barbara Maclean ahl the weh back to Knockalanish.”

But this dire threat stimulated them ; they pushed ahead and urged on the ancient animal in the shafts ; and ere long they came in sight of the eastern shores of the island—with the strip of cottages called Kilree—the bay—the rude quay and landing-slip—and, lying some few hundred yards out, a stumpy one-funnelled steamer that was again sending forth its alarming call. And was not yonder the

last boat already left? They waved their plaids; they whistled; some of them ran—and one of them fell, and picked himself up again. The end of it was that the horse and cart were stopped at the top of the beach; the young lass was helped to descend; the foremost two or three of the company, hurrying along, had become possessed of a boat lying by the slip; and when Barbara Maclean and her modest bundle had been deposited in the stern, the promiscuous crew unloosed the painter, shoved off the bow, plunged their oars into the water, and proceeded to pull away with a desperate resolution to overtake the departing steamer.

They pulled and they pulled and they pulled; and they were men of strength and sinew; the oars creaked and groaned in the thole-pins. They tugged and they strained and they splashed—heads down and teeth clenched; they put their shoulders into the work with a will; they would have cheered but that they dared not waste their breath; and again came a long howl from the *Sanda* to encourage them—doubtless she had perceived them through the gathering dusk, and might be disposed to grant them a few moments of grace.

But at this moment an appalling thing occurred. Long Lauchie the shoemaker, who had roused himself from his placid acquiescence of the last hour or two, and was now madly and heroically pulling stroke, chanced to raise his head—and behold there was some phantasmal object confronting his bleared eyes.

“Aw, God,” he cried, terror-stricken, “we have pulled the quay away with us!”

For there, undoubtedly, was the landing-slip, not a dozen yards off! And the beach, and the cottages—just above—were these also phantoms in the twilight? Surely they could not have hauled the whole island after them, out into the deep?

Then came one running down to the shore, gesticulating, shouting.

“There’s a line astern! The boat’s tied astern, man! Throw off the line!”

And at last it dawned upon Lauchie’s dimly-rotating brain that the boat must have been moored both fore and

aft alongside the slip—that they had only released the painter at the bow—and that all their frantic pulling had gone for nothing: in point of fact they had not moved a yard beyond the length of this still attaching line. So blindly and mechanically he undid the rope from the iron ring, and cast it into the water; then he resumed his place and his strenuous work—this time with considerably less weight dragging behind. And in due course they reached the steamer; the young lass, Long Lauchie, and Red Murdoch from Mull got on board; the others returned with the boat to the shore. And thus it was that Barbara Maclean left her native island to seek a home among her relatives in Duntroone. (*Chau*)

CHAPTER II.

A POOR STUDENT.

THE aunt of this Barbara Maclean kept a tobacconist's shop in Campbell Street, which is the main thoroughfare in the small seaside town of Duntroone; and one evening Mrs. Maclean and her daughter Jess were seated in the parlour behind the shop, from which, through a window in the intervening door, they could observe when any customer entered. Mrs. Maclean was a spruce and trim little body, fresh-complexioned, grey-haired, and bright and alert of look; her daughter Jessie, or Jess as she was called by her intimates, was a young woman of about twenty, flax-haired and freckled, of pleasant features and expression, and with grey eyes, ordinarily tranquil and kindly, that could on occasion show themselves merry and humorous enough, not to say malicious. For the rest, this was quite a snug and cheerful apartment on so cold a night; a brisk coal-fire was burning in the grate; a kettle simmered on the hob; and there were tea-things on the table.

"Ay," said the little Highland widow, as she continued busy with her knitting-needles, "it's a sad thing for a young lass to be left dissolute in the world——"

“Desolate, mother !” Jess said, impatiently, for her mother’s happy carelessness of speech was at times a source of considerable embarrassment when neighbours were about.

“Ay, jist that,” the widow said, contentedly, “it’s a sad thing for a young lass to be left dissolute. But it’s no so bad when she has friends to turn to ; and I’m sure when Barbara Maclean comes to us, there will not be a penny-worth of grudging in her welcome. No, no, my sister and me we had our quarrels in the old days ; but my sister’s lass will not want for a shelter while I have four walls round me and a fire to warm my hands. And I would not wonder if she took kindly to the ways of living here. She’ll find a difference between Knockalanish and Dun-troone, in the living and the housing. For well you know, Jess, it’s not me that’s given to the over-praising of creature comforts ; still, at the same time, I like what is Christian ; and I say that having cattle and human beings under the same roof is not Christian. It may be very healthy ; but it is not Christian. And never will I forget the fortnight I spent at Knockalanish when my sister was in her last illness ; the damp and the cold ; the peats soaked through with the snow ; the supper of mashed potatoes and milk ; and the breathing of the cows in the night. For of course my sister had the ben* of the house ; and the rest of us we had to put up with what beds and screens we could get ; and night after night I was lying awake, fearing to hear the tick of the death-watch, or the howling of a dog, and it was the breathing of the cows you could hear, and not so far away. Ay. And Donald Maclean he was never the good manager, nor my poor sister either, but after her death he lost heart altogether, and how he was getting the rent, or whether there was more and more of debt, no one could tell ; only this I am sure of, that when his daughter Barbara comes to us, she will not bring with her anything more than what she stands up in——”

At this moment some one entered the shop, and Jess hurried away to attend. It was a clerkly-looking youth, who wanted a brier-root pipe ; and very particular he was ; but at length he was satisfied ; whereupon Jess returned to the parlour.

* The inner apartment.

"Then there's the lad Allan," continued the warm-hearted little widow, still busy with her knitting. "Well, now, I am glad that he sometimes looks in of an evening; and he is one the more to show to Barbara that she has come among her own kith and kin, though his mother married a Lowlander and he has partly a Lowland name. But this is it now, Jess, my lass, that when he stays to supper I wish you would be pressing a little more on him—yes, yes—I wish you would be pressing a little more on him——"

Jessie Maclean's fair face flushed somewhat.

"Allan Henderson is very proud, mother," she said. "And if he suspected anything he would never come back."

"Pride and an empty stomach," said the small dame, sententiously, "are not even cousins twenty times removed. Starvation is the worst of training for any one, I do not care who he is; and the young man is foolish who refuses when there is plenty before him on the table. But I have heard of Allan and his ways; oh, yes, indeed: both his father and his mother have told me; that when he was at the College at Glasgow he was costing them nothing—well, next to nothing beyond the fees for the classes, and the books, and a lodging; and now he is paying back, and paying back, though they are not asking for anything, and the post-offus keeping them very comfortable now, and I dare say he has paid them far more than ever they lent him. Besides," she went on, "it's a poor trade the school-mastering. It's very little the School Board give him, after his hard work at the classes. And my heart is sore to see a young man going about at this time of the year without an overcoat—when it's I myself would gladly buy him one—and why should he not take it as a present, from his mother's cousin——"

The flush on the girl's face had deepened: she turned to trim the fire by way of hiding her vexation.

"You could not do that, mother!" she exclaimed, in a low voice. "You would not insult him?—and turn him away from the house?—when he has not too many friends. And as for schoolmastering," she continued, raising her head—and at times speaking with an involuntary tremor of pride in her tones, "he may not be always a schoolmaster,

though there are many schoolmasters that are great and famous men, at the large schools throughout the country. But if Allan is only a poor schoolmaster at present, it will not be always so, you may take my word for that. Of course he has not told me his plans and his hopes—why should he?—I think he is too shy to tell them to any one ; but I can see what he is ; I can see what there is in him ; and I know this, mother, that many a long day hence, you and I will be wondering that the Allan Henderson they are all talking of in London used to come into our parlour in Duntroone and smoke his pipe of an evening. It may be a long time yet ; but it will be a great day for us—even if he has no recollection of us ; and you'll bear me out, mother, that I prophesied it——” Some slight noise arrested her attention, and she looked up. “Mercy on us, here's Allan himself !” she ejaculated, in an undertone ; and therewith she rose to open the door for him—the colour not yet quite gone from her face.

He was a tall young man of about three or four-and-twenty, his figure slim and spare but well-knit, his head bent forward slightly, his features distinctly ascetic, yet with plenty of firmness about the lines of his mouth, his forehead square and capable, and showing a premature line or two, no doubt the result of hard and perhaps injudicious study. But it was his eyes that chiefly claimed attention : large, soft, brown eyes, that were usually contemplative and absent, but that could become singularly penetrating when his attention was challenged. It was a concentration, in obedience to any such summons, that appeared to demand some brief effort ; but his perceptions, once aroused, were swift ; he seemed instantly to divine whether this person or this utterance was worth heeding or to be turned away from with indifference and contempt. Jess used laughingly to say of him, when she was grown spiteful—

“Poor Allan, the matter with him is that there's a cloud betwixt him and all the world around him ; and when you think he is looking over to Lismore, or to Morven, or Kingairloch, it's the cloud he's staring at, and the grand things he sees there—Roman battles, and such like, I suppose. And some day he will be staring at the fine things before him, and he'll step over the end of the quay,

and that will be the last of poor Allan !” And she would continue her flouting : “ Going on for four-and-twenty, and as big a baby as ever he was in his childhood ! He has not got accustomed to anything ! Everything is new to him—and everything wonderful—if he comes on a fox-glove growing in the woods—or watches a young foal following its mother—or he’ll pick up a shell from the shore, and that’s quite enough to stare at and wonder at too ! And what he gets to laugh at, passes me !—he’ll burst out laughing when there was no amusement intended at all, and that is not pleasant to people’s feelings ; or again, when the young folk are a little merry, and mocking at each other, he will sit as glum as if he was looking at his own funeral going by. Temper ?—temper, indeed !—he is the worst-tempered young man in Duntroone ! ”

Yet the visitor who now came in did not look as if he had an evil temper ; rather he seemed diffident as he took the seat that the widow cheerfully offered him.

“ I was passing,” said he, by way of apology, “ and I thought I would step in to ask if you had heard of your niece. Do you know if the *Sanda* was able to call at Kilree ?—the weather has been bad out there.”

“ Well, it’s little I am likely to hear,” responded the widow, “ until Barbara and Lauchlan MacIntyre walk straight into the shop, or come knocking at the door of the house ; though maybe some one will run up from the quay to tell us when the *Sanda* shows round the point. There’s Tobermory, to be sure, and they might have telegraphed from Tobermory ; but dear me, what does that poor lass understand about the telegraph ? and Lauchlan—well, Lauchlan would be amongst his friends. And yet I was cautioning him too. ‘ Lauchie,’ I was saying to him, ‘ this time at least it is absolutely comparative that you keep a hold on yourself, and behave yourself at the funeral, and in bringing away the lass.’ And he was saying ‘ Yes, yes, mistress,’ again and again. But I have had experience of Lauchie, that is a good enough man and a sensible man until the whiskey gets over him ; and when he begins laughing, then it’s a sign you need not try to talk any more to him ; and afterwards, when he comes out of it and is sober again, oh, the poor, down-hearted crayture that he

is!—as if he had committed every sin in the Catalogue——”

“You mean the Decalogue, mother!” Jess remonstrated.

“Ay: sometimes they say the one and sometimes the other,” the widow went on, with blithe effrontery. “But I’m thinking the *Sanda* should be in ere long now; and there’s a bit supper waiting over the way; and it would be very agreeable to us, Allan, if you would step across with us, when the shop is shut, and take your place at the table, to show Barbara that she has come amongst several friends——”

But he seemed to shrink back from this proposal.

“No, no, thanks to you all the same,” he said—and he had a grave, gentle, impressive voice, that Jess listened to as if every word were of value. “When a girl comes to a new home in this way, surely she would rather be with her own people, and have no half-strangers to meet. Afterwards there will be plenty of time for her to make acquaintances.”

“And it is very ill done of you, Allan Henderson,” said the little widow, boldly and indignantly, “to speak of yourself as a stranger, or half-stranger, in my house. Perhaps these are the ways they have at the College; but I am not understanding such ways. Jess, she must be for ever making excuses; and it’s this one’s pride, and that one’s pride; but I am not understanding such pride when there is the family-relationship between us. Oh, yes, every one has heard of the old saying about the Macleans and their pride and their poverty; ‘Though I am poor, I am well-born; God be thanked I am a Maclean!’ But where is the place for such things between cousins? And when you know very well, Allan, that over the way, and every night in the week, there is a place at the table for you, and Jessie and me sitting by ourselves, and perhaps you alone in your lodgings, and maybe without a fire, too—for I have heard of such things with young men eager to get on in the world—well, then, it may be College manners for you to stay away, but it is not good Highland manners. And that is the truth I am telling you at last.”

Jess Maclean looked apprehensive and troubled; but the young man took all this in good part.

"One is not always one's own master," he answered, quietly. "I can only give you my best thanks for so kindly asking me. And I am sure you know another old saying: 'If a man cannot get to his own country, it is a good thing to be in sight of it'?"

"Will you not light your pipe now, Allan?" Jess put in skilfully—to get away from a ticklish subject.

But at this suggestion, Mrs. Maclean, who had been regarding the young man (perhaps with some little compunction, for she was not accustomed to scold), quickly rose from her seat and left the room, disappearing into the front shop, and evidently bent on some errand.

"I hope you are not vexed with my mother, Allan," said Jess, at once.

"Oh, no, indeed," he made answer. "Every one knows that she is the kindest of women. And when your cousin comes from the islands, she will soon find that she is in a friendly home."

Presently Mrs. Maclean reappeared, bringing with her an unopened tin canister.

"This is a new mixture, Allan," said she, as she placed the box before the young man, "that has been sent me from Glasgow, and I would be glad if you would take the canister home with you, and try the mixture, and tell me your opinion, so that I could be advising my customers when they come in. Will you put it in your pocket, or will I send Christina along with it to you in the morning?"

Jess looked swiftly and in alarm from one to the other of them. But if his stubborn Scotch independence prompted him to refuse the gift, the Highland blood that also flowed in his veins forbade that the refusal should be in any way discourteous. He hesitated for a second—to find some excuse; and there was some colour of embarrassment visible on his forehead.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mrs. Maclean," said he, after this involuntary pause. "But—but I have been thinking of giving up my pipe altogether."

And now the anxiety of the younger woman gave place to an infinite distress and pity: was he—simply because he had been driven into a corner, and found himself unable to refuse in any other manner this proffered kindness—was

he going to deprive himself of the chief, perhaps the only, comfort of a poor and solitary student ?

But at this moment her attention was distracted. Some one entered the shop, and approached the dividing door ; and a glance through the half-curtained pane told her who this was—this was Mr. Peter McFadyen, coal merchant and town-councillor. She rose to receive the new visitor : but she did so with impatient anger in her heart : for she knew that now in a very few minutes the proud and contemptuous Allan would be on his homeward way.

CHAPTER III.

SIGNALS OF DISTRESS.

YET Peter McFadyen himself was about the last man in the world to imagine that he could be unwelcome anywhere ; and as he now, after salutations and inquiries, proceeded to make himself comfortable in front of the fire—pulling out his pipe and tobacco-pouch the while—he went on to give these neighbours a vivid account of his day's doings on the golf-links, nothing doubting of their sympathy and keen interest. He was a little man, round and chubby, with eager, twinkling eyes, a clipped sandy-brown beard, and hair becoming conspicuously seant on the top. For the rest, the rumour in Duntroone was that McFadyen, who was an old bachelor, had it in view to amalgamate his fortunes with those of the widow ; but some there were who surmised that Peter cherished other and more romantic designs.

“Dod,” he said, with a triumphant chuckle, “I’m thinking the station-master and me we were showing the young fellows something this afternoon ! Not that I would call either Mr. Gilmour or myself elderly folk——”

“Indeed, Mr. McFadyen,” said the widow, politely, “it will be many a long day before you can think of such a thing.”

“A few years one way or the other is nothing at all,”

responded Mr. McFadyen, with obvious satisfaction. "Just nothing at all! It is a question of keeping yourself in good fettle; and if one of they young fellows and myself were to start away from Taynuilt, I wonder which of us would be the first to reach the top of Cruachan Ben. Ay, or throwing the hammer: that is a capital test of what is in a man's shoulders; and I should not be afraid of a match with some of them—not me! I've got a practising-place marked out in the backyard—though it's rather narrow—and if anybody was a bit careless, the hammer would make a fearfu' smash of the little greenhouse——"

"Did I ever thank you for the christmas-anthemums, Mr. McFadyen?" the widow interposed. "They were just beautiful—though Jessie was sorry you should be cutting them——"

But Peter was not to be diverted from vaunting his physical prowess.

"Running—jumping—pulling an oar," he continued, with buoyant assurance (and perhaps widening out his chest a little, for he must have known that Jessie Maclean's "grey eyes feminine" were now regarding him), "give me a week or two's training, and I'm not afraid of any of they boasting young chaps. But it's the links, Mrs. Maclean, it's the links I was coming to; and we did well there this afternoon, I can tell you! We did well, both Gilmour and me; but I beat him—the fact is, Gilmour is a little thing stiff in the joints, though he doesna like to hear it said. Well, we started from the teeing-ground just behind the Dunchoillie farm; and you know Colquhoun's meadow, Mrs. Maclean, there's a burn comes down through the middle, and then there's a bank covered with whin-bushes: it's just a desperate bunker to get into. Very well: I put the ball on the tee—a little sand; not too much sand; too much sand's a great mistake—and I let drive! Dod, that was a drive! Away she went with a ping like a rifle-bullet—sailing and sailing—sailing and sailing—and getting smaller and smaller—until my eyes were filled wi' water staring against the white clouds—and Gilmour he lost sight of the ball altogether. 'It's down in the whins!' he cries. 'Ye gomeril,' I answers him, 'it's more near the putting-green, if not close up to the hole!'—for I was just certain

I had got far away over the burn and the whins, and was safe on to the higher land. Would you believe it?—when we got up, the ball was within twenty yards of the flag; and in three more strokes I was out; the first hole for four!—and me that never touched a golf-club until last summer!”

Peter had been growing excited: he now moderated his warmth.

“I did not do so well at the second hole,” he observed darkly. “Maybe it was the wind; or maybe I toed the ball when I was driving from the tee; anyway it got over the dyke and into the road, ay, and into the cart-rut, and I thought I was never going to get it over the dyke again. Bother the thing, I smashed my iron niblick clean in two—but—but I’m thinking there must have been a flaw in the wood——”

He hastened away from these deplorable reminiscences.

“The Pinnacle!” he said, laughing with eager anticipation. “We had a rare game at the Pinnacle! For that’s a most desperate place, Mrs. Maclean, and no mistake—as steep as the side of a house—and all soomin with water—and unless you get clear away on to the top, what happens is that your ball strikes the face of the hill, and doesna lie there, but just comes quietly trintle, trintle, trintling down the slope and back to your feet again. And there was I up on the top—right up on the putting-green, after a fine long drive—looking down on Gilmour; and I declare there never was such an angry man!—hacking away with his cleek—splashing the mud—and sweerin’ every time the ball would come trintle, trintling back down to his feet. ‘Gilmour,’ I cries to him, ‘put the ball in your pocket, man, and bring it up with ye; it’s the only way at the Pinnacle!’ And he would not speak, so angry he was; and still angrier was he when we started away for the next hole; for he forgot it was blowing up there on the top—blowing right across from Mull and Morven and the Frith of Lorn; and he put far too much sand on the tee—far too much sand, for he’s an obstinate man, Gilmour, and will not take a telling—and in his anger he made a drive that should have sent the ball over to Lismore! Did it?” Peter asked—and he roared with laughter, and his small eyes twinkled, and he rubbed his hands. “There was just a blash of sand!—a

blash of sand—that rose in the air—and back it came in his face—just filling his eyes, and filling his mouth, so that he went about splutterin', and could not even swear! Dod, the station-master was an angry man this afternoon!—it's a fearfu' place the Pinnacle!"

At this point the tall and grave young schoolmaster rose to go, notwithstanding a half-concealed deprecatory glance from Jess.

"Allan, my lad," said Mr. McFadyen, familiarly, "have you heard of the dance that Mr. and Mrs. McAskill of the Argyll Arms are going to give to the Gaelic Choir?"

"No," said the schoolmaster, somewhat curtly.

"Yes, indeed, then," continued Peter, with much importance. "In the Volunteer Drill-Hall. A great affair, for the Choir will sing glees between the dances, and there'll be plenty of pipers. And sure I am that every one in this room at this minute will have an invite; and I have been thinking, Mrs. Maclean, that if you would let me call for you and Miss Jessie, I would bring a machine and drive you up to the Drill-Hall, for it's a bad road in the dark, and it would never do for you and Miss Jessie to get your feet wet——"

"Mr. McFadyen," said Jess, with some touch of resentment, "I think you are forgetting what has just happened in our family——"

"Oh, but the dance is a long way off yet!" said Peter. And then he went on, with humorous shyness: "Maybe, if any one should have a doubt about going, maybe that one's myself: maybe they'll be saying that my dancing days should be over——"

"And who could be saying that!" interposed the widow, promptly. "That would be nonsense indeed! I should not wonder, now, if you could give lessons to some of those young lads and lasses."

He turned to her with sudden seriousness.

"If there's one thing surer than another, Mrs. Maclean," he said, "it's this—that a well-trained step is never forgotten. Begin well—that's everything in dancing; and ye acquire a grace—an elegance, I might say—that becomes a kind of second nature. Not that I object to a rough-and-tumble reel now and again; no, no; I'm not more afraid

of a foursome reel than I am of a foursome round on the links. But there's something finer—Miss Jessie, do you know the Varsoviana ? ”

“ I have seen it,” Jess Maclean answered coldly.

“ But it's the simplest thing—the simplest thing in the world ! ” he vehemently urged. “ Just stand up for a minute, now, and I'll show ye—— ”

He himself got up, put his toes into the first position, and held out his hand to encourage her. But she declined to move.

“ If you please, I would rather not, Mr. McFadyen,” she said, with flushed face.

“ But look ! ” said he. And therewith, whistling an air with pursed lips, he proceeded to execute certain short, stiff, marionette-like movements, as well as he could in the circumscribed space at his disposal.

“ D'you see now ?—as simple as simple !—then lead off with the next foot—the other foot at every turn—d'ye see how simple it is ?—and the most elegant thing that ever was seen, with a lot of couples in a ball-room.” He ceased from these valorous efforts, and resumed his chair, proud, breathless, and happy. “ We'll get you to have a try at it some other evening, Miss Jessie,” said he, gaily. “ I'm thinking we'll be able to show them something the night of Mrs. McAskill's dance ! ”

Allan Henderson had been waiting patiently, not wishing to interrupt.

“ I will bid you good-evening now, Mrs. Maclean,” said he.

“ Good-night, Allan,” she made answer, holding out her hand.

But Jess followed him into the front shop, shutting the door behind her.

“ I am sorry if Mr. McFadyen and his blethers have driven you away, Allan : you do not come to see us as much as you might.”

“ I must get home to my books,” he answered her, evasively.

“ And I hope, Allan,” she said, regarding him with anxious and earnest eyes, “ that you are not working too hard at your studies.”

“ Well,” said he, “ when one is young one must work

hard. It is the only time : there is no after time. But I'll be looking in to see you and your mother again one of these evenings. Good-night, Jessie."

"Good-night, Allan !" said she ; and when he had gone, she lingered a while : she did not care to return at once to the parlour, where doubtless Mr. McFadyen was still engaged in magnifying his strength, his agility, and innumerable accomplishments.

On the other hand, Allan, when he left the tobacconist's shop, did not immediately return to his lodging and his books. He was at an age, and in circumstances, that imperatively demanded close and strenuous self-communion ; and that he was accustomed to seek in solitary walks along the seashore, or up on the moorland wastes, especially at night, when darkness and silence were abroad. And tumultuous indeed were the problems he found confronting him in these lonely rambles. There were deep and inscrutable searchings of heart, for no matter what his training and his traditions may have been, he was resolute and uncompromising in his search after such truth as might be discoverable—about human nature, and the surroundings of human nature, and the more awful mysteries beyond ; there were ambitious projects springing thick from an over-active brain—elusive, distracting phantoms that just as often as not beat wild wings against the *res angusta domi* ; the *res angusta domi* itself came in with its sordid cares and pinchings—the need of a pair of weather-proof boots—the counting the cost of a holiday-trip to see his father and mother, who kept the post-office at Inverblair—this latest project of giving up tobacco—and the like ; while ever-recurrent were the vague and harassing visions of youth—that troubled questioning of the future, with all its tantalising hopes, its looming anxieties, its hidden dangers and pitfalls. But happily for him, in this seething-time, in this time of storm and stress, he had been spared the crowning misery of all. The "cruel madness of love" had not overtaken him : that honeyed poison-cup at all events had not been placed to his lips.

He passed through the now half-dormant town, went round the obscure and silent quays, ascended a steep incline, and eventually, emerging from the black shadow of some

larches, stepped out upon a little plateau on the summit of the Gallows Hill. It was a favourite resort of his : here he could pace up and down, exorcising the demons of unrest and doubt and despondency, and bidding the great surrounding mountains lend some little measure of their invulnerable calm. On this particular night, it is true, the darkness was such that nothing was visible of all those vast mountain-ranges ; but well he knew the whereabouts of the mighty peaks and shoulders, from Ben Buie and Creachbeinn and Dun-da-gu, over in Mull, to Glashven and Fuar Bheinn up in Morven, from the far giants of Glencoe, murmuring to each other across the silence of the valleys, round to Ben Cruachan and Ben Eunaich, above the lonely and ghostly solitudes of Glen-strae. August companions, to be sure, even if unseen ; they appeared to lift the soul away from the trivial tasks and frettings of everyday life ; these he seemed for the moment to have left behind him—down in yonder little town, that he could now make out only by certain glowworm dots scattered here and there, indicating the semicircular sweep of the bay.

Of a sudden his eyes were attracted elsewhither. Far away at the back of Kerrara island a white shaft of fire had sprung into the mirk of the night—a distant, trembling, curving, silent thing that glared for a second or so, and then vanished, leaving the darkness as impenetrable as before. And for a moment he asked himself whether the Mull people—the people down about Duart—were setting off fireworks. But what occasion could there be for fireworks ? The next instant another slender white shaft rose silent into the air ; and now, judging by the position of the Lismore light—the one steady, radiant star in all this wide, black picture—these signals seemed to be coming from some point between Lismore and Mull ? But signals ?—not fireworks at all. And if signals, then signals from some vessel in distress ? And what vessel was now expected, except the *Sanda*, that was bringing to the household of the Macleans the young girl from the outer isles ?

He sped away down the hill-side and gained the dusky thoroughfares. The few people about had not noticed the signals—perhaps the northern end of Kerrara island had prevented their being seen. But soon there was sufficient

commotion in the little town ; and one old sailor, hurrying along with his companions to a commanding point, to discover what had happened or was happening, was heard to say to himself—

“The *Sanda*? But the *Sanda* would be coming over from Craigenure? And how the duffle could she get so far down to the west?”

CHAPTER IV.

ON A ROCK.

Now when the *Sanda* left Craigenure, Long Lauchlan the shoemaker was down in the fore-cabin, snugly huddled up in a corner ; and he was nursing a soda-water bottle half-filled with whiskey, while he softly sang to himself. It was not a lugubrious song ; but lugubriously and slowly he sang it, especially the refrain—

*“If ye’ll walk,
If ye’ll walk,
If ye’ll walk with me anywhere,”*

the *a*’s in which he pronounced as the *a* in *dark*, dwelling on them indefinitely. Red Murdoch the Mull drover, who had been having a royal time of it since these two left Kilree, and who chanced to be the only other occupant of the cabin, at length interrupted angrily.

“To the devil with your south-country songs !” he cried, in Gaelic.

But the long, melancholy-visaged shoemaker took no offence ; he was too happy.

“It’s a beautiful song—a beautiful song,” he said, also in Gaelic. “And if it is a south-country song, it is a song that is known to every fisherman from Peterhead to Buckie. There is no more favourite song.” He raised his forefinger, to beat the slow time. “A beautiful song—

*‘It’s I will buy you a pennyporth of preens,
If ye’ll walk,
If ye’ll walk,
If ye’ll walk with me anywhere.’”*

"The man is a fool that would sing such a song!" said the red-bearded drover, bluntly.

Whereupon Lauchie laughed and chuckled quietly to himself.

"Oh, yes, I may be a fool. But I would rather be a fool than a man with bad luck."

"Who is a man with bad luck?" demanded Murdoch, his bushy eyebrows drawing together.

Lauchie appeared to be secretly amused.

"Then you do not know you are of the same name with the man of bad luck?" he went on. "Oh, you do not know what they say of the luck of Red Murdoch? They say to any one 'You have the luck of Red Murdoch; for when Red Murdoch is in the north, then the herring are in the south.'"

"If I knew the man that said that of me," rejoined Murdoch, with fiery eyes—and he even thrust forth a massive and hairy fist, clenched, to give emphasis to his threat, "I would bash his head against a stone wall."

"Have a dram, Murdoch," said Lauchie, tendering the bottle, which was not refused. "It's not I that am going out of the house to-night, no, not to fight anyone. I am a peaceable person. Better a warm fireside than a cold hill-side, that is what the wise man of Ross was saying. Murdoch," he continued, suddenly reverting to the blissful days that were now nearing an end, "it was a beautiful funeral. That is what I am thinking. It was a beautiful funeral. There was no parsimony. How many gallons of whiskey, would you say?—seven?—ay, ay, and maybe more like seven and a half. There was two or three glasses apiece when we came together; and there was two more at the house; well, that was right and proper; and although it is not easy for eight men to keep in step, when they have a heavy coffin on their shoulders, there was not a single man fell into the road, and each time the coffin was set down, it was set down as gently as if it were a cradle, not a coffin at all. And two more glasses to each man at the gate of the cemetery. And two more coming away. After that—aw, God, I am not remembering much—there was little use in counting—but sure I am there was no parsimony; and it was the fine funeral that was given to

Donald Maclean of Knockalanish. Have you a match, Murdoch ? ”

“ I am tired of giving matches to a fool of a man that will not carry them for himself,” answered Red Murdoch, sulkily and tauntingly.

But Lauchie would not quarrel. He resignedly put his pipe in his pocket again ; he settled himself in a corner, his head drooping somewhat ; and he resumed his placid and happy communing with himself.

“ A beautiful song—not a fisherman from Peterhead to Buckie but knows it—a beautiful song—

*‘ It’s I will buy you a braw new gown,
With buttons so fine, and flounces to the ground,
If ye’ll waak,
If ye’ll waak,
If ye’ll waak with me anywhere.’*

A beautiful song. . . . And a beautiful funeral . . . no parsimony at all——”

Then his head fell wholly : he was fast asleep. Red Murdoch glanced at him with angry scorn ; threw a parting oath at him ; and turned to leave the cabin. And this he managed, after several efforts—for the steps of the companion were narrow and exceedingly steep—to do : hands, knees, and feet were all brought into requisition ; and eventually he emerged into the upper air.

Meanwhile what had become of the young lass from the outer isles whom these two worthies were convoying to Duntroone ? Once or twice she had been invited to go down into the fore-cabin ; but she had refused—for the odour of the place was overpowering ; she preferred to remain on deck ; and the steward had considerably brought her some tea and some food. She had got into a more or less sheltered place well away forward ; and there she sate with her tartan shawl drawn close around her, silent and solitary, and half-terrified by the strange things around her. For she had never been on a steamer before ; and although the monotony of the long voyage had produced a state of semi-stupefaction, she remained nervously alive to all her surroundings—to the throbbing of the screw, the lash of the waves along the vessel’s side, and the dusky figures moving about the deck. The night was obscure and

squally ; but at least there was no rain ; and the high bulwarks were a sort of protection to her against the hurling gusts of wind.

Now there had come on board at Craigenure two gentlemen who were returning home to Duntroone—one of them, indeed, the principal doctor there, the other a well-known bailie ; and these two had wandered up to the bow of the ship to look around them ; and they were chatting to each other. Barbara Maclean heard every word.

“ Surely we’re keeping a long way from Lismore, Bailie,” the Doctor said, regarding the steady and golden ray of the lighthouse that was shining boldly through the mirk of the night. “ I wonder how many times I have crossed from Craigenure, and yet I never saw a course like this taken before.”

“ Maybe Pattison is trying to cheat the tide,” replied the Bailie. “ There’s fearful tides running here at times.”

“ Well, Captain Pattison should know his own business best,” the Doctor was saying—when of a sudden he gripped his companion’s arm. “ What’s that there—right ahead ! ” he exclaimed, staring with amazement and consternation at some vague, half-invisible, dark object that seemed to loom up out of the water. And then again, instantly recognising what was about to happen, he called out—“ It’s the Lady Rock ! For God’s sake, man, hold on !—hold on to something ! ”—while he himself caught at the nearest portion of the standing rigging, and braced himself as best he might to withstand the coming crash.

There appeared to be no interval. Almost simultaneously with his shouted warning came the inevitable, the terrific shock that seemed to rive the ship from stem to stern ; then she lurched forward and upward, with a hideous grinding sound ; then she dipped somewhat ; and then she hung—hung there for one dreadful second of silence, as if she were some dumb animal mutely asking what was next required of her—whether she should carry on some half-dozen yards farther, and, with smashed bows and started plates, go headlong to the bottom, in fifty fathoms of water. But no : she remained firm : and she remained upright, though with a strong list to starboard ; and now, after that one moment of paralysed silence and suspense, an inde-

scribable clamour and commotion ensued—women shrieking and running hither and thither for their relatives, the sailors hurrying along with lanterns, the captain calling his orders from the bridge. And all through this bewilderment of noise and confusion there ran the ominous hoarse surge of the tide on the isolated rocks beneath and around them ; it was as a voice out of the unseen ; and it was a clamorous and an angry voice—a voice that threatened doom.

Barbara Maclean had been thrown violently on to the deck ; but when she raised herself, she had no thought of rushing about, claiming protection and succour. Her faculties had been stunned and blunted by these terrors of the sea and of the night ; and when she resumed her place, she only pulled her shawl around her, cowering, and perhaps crying a little in her helplessness. She knew nothing of what was going forward. She saw dark figures going quickly about with lanterns ; but they did not chance to come near her ; and even in that case she would have been too timid to put any question. It is true, she did utter a brief cry of dismay when the first rocket, with a shrill and sudden scream, sprung high and blinding into the gloom ; but in time she got used even to that ; while the intermittent thunder of the signal-cannon only seemed to shake her frame physically. She was too dazed to feel further or acute alarm ; what might happen would have to happen ; she was far away from her own land, and from things with which she was familiar. As for the two men who had in a kind of fashion undertaken to see her safely to Duntroone, neither was of near relationship to her, and she could not expect much care from them ; besides she knew the ways of people who had been to a Highland funeral out in the west ; and she was content to remain unassisted and alone.

The odd thing was that in such a crisis of danger Red Murdoch should have thought first, not of this forlorn creature, but of his boon companion, with whom he was constantly quarrelling. He stumbled along to the fore-cabin ; he steadied himself at the top of the companion ; he howled aloud his warning ; and then, finding there was no reply, he made his way—to speak plainly, he fell—down

the steps ; he crossed the floor, and seized Lauchie MacIntyre by the coat-collar.

"Here, man, come away !—do you not understand ?—we may all of us be at the bottom of the sea in a minute !—"

Lauchie endeavoured, but in a gentle manner, to repel this interference.

"No," he said, slowly, but firmly, "I will not stir from the house this night. It is I that am knowing when I am well off. Go away yourself, Murdoch. It's a warm house I am in ; and a warm house is better than a cold hill-side——"

"Son of the Devil !" roared Murdoch, furiously. "Do you not know that we are on a rock ?"

"And the house that is founded on a rock is a beautiful house," said Lauchie, solemnly. "Have you a match, Murdoch ?"

Murdoch did not answer, but now with both hands he seized the coat-collar of the shoemaker, and by main force dragged him to the foot of the companion. Then first he tried to shove him up the steps ; next he tried to drag him up ; presently they both fell together ; and it is impossible to say what might have happened had not a sailor, hearing some noise, come to the top of the companion, and called down—

"Uss there any one below there ?"

"Yes, indeed," called Murdoch in reply. "Come here and give me a little assistance with a friend of mine, that uss rather too sleepy to go ashore by himself."

The sailor came running down the companion ; and fortunately he was a powerfully built man.

"Going ashore ?" said he, grimly, as he proceeded to hoist and shoulder these two up the steps. "It's miles aweh from any shore you are ! And the sooner you are out of this boat the better : would you like to be left behind ?"

For now it appeared that the captain had decided that the passengers, at least, should descend from the steamer, taking such precarious chance of safety as might be afforded by the solitary reef on which they had struck. The gangway was open ; a ladder affixed ; and by the

dusky glare of two lamps woman after woman, and man after man, went down the side, to seek out for some footing among the wet and slippery seaweed and the hidden pools of salt water. They crowded together, these poor wretches, deafened by the rush and roar of the tides all around them ; and perhaps wondering when those baleful forces would arise out of the dark and seize and engulf them. They dared hardly move, for a single false step might plunge them into unknown deeps ; and the lights of the steamer were dim. Those indeed were best off who could cling on to the massive iron bars of the beacon that marks the rock—a flameless skeleton of a structure that towered away above them into the sombre skies. And meanwhile, at intervals, from the deck of the ship, the rockets went screaming into the night, and the signal cannon boomed its reverberations across the waste of waves. But half-hour after half-hour went by, and there was no response.

“They can neither see nor hear us,” the Doctor said to his neighbour. “We are too far away for the sound to carry. And Kerrara lies between us and Duntroone : they will not see the rockets.”

“But surely the people at Lismore light must see them !” said the Bailie.

“Yes, indeed, that is possible. But they have no telegraph there.”

“No telegraph at the lighthouse ?” exclaimed the Bailie, indignantly. “Then it is a monstrous and mischievous shame ! A fine piece of economy ! Who is responsible for that—the Board of Trade ?” And then he added : “But at least they have a boat at the lighthouse ?”

“Ay, but not a boat that would be of much use to us, across that driving sea.”

Nevertheless the captain was about to tempt those stormy waters, in hopes of obtaining assistance from the mainland. In the dull glow of the lamps, the shipwrecked crowd could perceive the boat being lowered from the side of the stranded vessel ; presently the mate and two of the hands had got into it ; and in a few minutes it had disappeared—into the mysterious surrounding chaos. There was no cheer raised as the boat departed ; this small assemblage of folk, hardly visible to each other, and hardly to be distinguished from

the blackness of the reef, was too dispirited and perturbed ; Duntroone and the possibilities of help were miles away ; while the dangers immediately encompassing them were pressing and near.

“When the tide rises, how many of us could clamber up and hold on to the beacon ?” asked the Bailie of his companion.

Barbara Maclean heard this question put, but did not divine its import. She was standing alone and friendless and helpless ; weeping silently ; her shawl not much of a protection now against the blasts of wind tearing across the exposed reef. She was benumbed with cold and misery ; not knowing what might happen : conscious, too, that all her little possessions—her chest, containing everything she owned in the world—had been left on board the steamer—the steamer that at any moment might slip forward and vanish from before their eyes, into fifty fathoms of ocean.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIREFLY.

WHEN the young schoolmaster, alarmed by those signals of distress that rose white and silent into the distant night, sped away down from the Gallows Hill, he made straight for the house of the agent of the Steam Packet Company.

“It may be the *Sanda*,” said the agent, at once hurrying off to get his overcoat and hat. “She’s hours late as it is. Anyway we must run out to see what is the matter ; and luckily the *Firefly* lighter is lying at the quay : she’ll not be long in getting up steam.”

“Would you let me go with you, Mr. Stewart ?” Allan asked.

“Why not ? Why not ? You’re the first to bring the news——”

“For there’s a young lass,” Allan explained, “coming by the *Sanda* from Kilree ; she’s a niece of Mrs. Maclean in Campbell Street ; and the Macleans would take it as a friendly

thing if I went out to see if there was anything to be done for her——"

"Why not?" said the good-natured agent; and he took up his stick, which was his symbol of authority, and opened the door for himself and his companion.

"And would there be time for me to run round to Mrs. Maclean's and get a few wraps and things of that kind?" continued Allan. "The night is cold."

"Well, yes, if you are quick about it; but you must not keep me waiting," said the agent, as he hastened away on his own errand, along the dark and wet sea-front.

It took the tall young schoolmaster but a minute or two to reach Mrs. Maclean's house—the shop being now shut.

"And is the *Sanda* coming in at last?" cried the cheerful little widow. "And will there be time for Jessie and me to go down to meet Barbara?"

"Well, no," said Allan, with a trifle of hesitation. "The *Sanda* is not in sight yet. But there's a ship out there in some kind of trouble; and I'm going out with Mr. Stewart, in a lighter; and I was thinking—if it was the *Sanda*—well, I might take a few things that might be of use to your niece, for the weather has been very wet and rough lately——"

At the mere suggestion that anything had happened, or might be happening, to the steamer bringing her niece Barbara to Duntroone, the widow became quite unnerved with fright; and her anxious and irrelevant questions, to which there was no possible answer, were nothing but a stumbling-block in the way. It was Jess who was the helpful one—who instantly divined what was wanted. In the briefest space of time she had cleverly put together a serviceable bundle of shawls and wraps, to say nothing of a pair of mittens, a paper bag of sweet biscuits, and a flask of some innocent cordial. And with these things he was speeding away—indeed, he had got well down the staircase—when at the last moment Jess called to him again.

"Allan!—Allan!"

He looked up. She came running down the stone steps (for the Macleans lived in a small tenement of flats) and by the uncertain light he saw that she held something in her hand.

"If you are going out in the steamer," said she, "will you not put this muffler round your neck? It may be a coarse night outside the bay."

Well, he was loth to offend this gentle half-cousin of his; but still—still—there was something in the man's nature that drove him to refuse.

"No, thank you, Jessie," he said. "No, thank you—I am not afraid of the cold."

"Oh," said she, "if you will not take it because you think it is one of the things that women wear, then that is not very friendly. If I were you, I would not be so proud!"

The light in the stairway was dim; it was the tone of her voice that told him he had vexed her.

"Oh, then, I will take it," he said, "and maybe it will be of use to your cousin Barbara." And therewith he hurried off again, for he was anxious not to keep Mr. Stewart waiting.

As he passed along, it became apparent that the news had spread through the little town of something having happened to the *Sanda*—or perhaps some other vessel—outside; and when he reached the quay, there was quite a group of folk, mostly superannuated fishermen, eagerly discussing the possibilities. The steam-lighter was ready to start; as soon as he got on board, the ropes were thrown off, the blades of the screw began to lash the water, and the high-bowed, unwieldy craft was soon moving crescent-wise out into the bay. And then, as she gathered speed, the dull orange points that told of the window-panes of Duntroone—along the shore and up on the hill-side—gradually receded; and ahead of them was a great black world of invisible mountain and sea and sky, with ever and always the solitary ray of Lismore lighthouse burning steadfast and clear.

"If the *Sanda's* engines have broken down over there," said Mr. Stewart, "the mouth of the Sound of Mull is a bad place. There will be a strong ebb tide running, and she may drift just anywhere."

"But the rockets I saw," Allan made answer, "seemed all to rise from the same spot; and as far as I could make out, that would be over near the Lady Rock, or somewhere in that direction."

"If Pattison has got the *Sandu* on to the Lady Rock," observed the agent, "the sooner he sends in his certificate to the Board of Trade the better. But it's not believable!—he's an experienced man——"

The remarkable thing, however, was that though they had by this time rounded Kerrara point, there was no sign of any vessel anywhere—no repetition of those swift white messengers that had attracted Allan Henderson's attention when he was on the top of the Gallows Hill. The night, it is true, was pitch dark and squally, and there were occasional gusts of rain flying about; but all the same they were now out in the open, and a ship's rocket ought to have been visible a great distance off.

"Allan, lad," said Mr. Stewart, "I hope you have not brought us on a wild-goose chase."

And Allan himself began to think back. His eyes could not have deceived him? He had never been subject to hallucinations, even when he was working hardest at his studies—with scant fuel for the engine. And surely there could be no mistake about his actually having beheld those long shafts of silvery fire spring into the black heavens?

"I think I wass seeing a light," called the man who was peering over the bows, "just about right ahead, and no so far aweh."

All eyes were now eagerly turned in one direction.

"Ay, there it is!—there it is!" called one after the other—as an ineffectual glimmer flickered just above the waves, and then vanished.

"It's a small boat—most likely with a message," said Mr. Stewart to the owner of the lighter. "Slack down your speed, Thomson, and let them take their own time about coming near."

The next instant there was another brief flare among the unseen waves ahead, but only for an instant: the people in the rowing boat had presumably lit a bunch of paper, to warn the steamer of their whereabouts, and the wind had directly blown out the flame. Nevertheless they at last got within hailing distance—though with great caution, for the unwieldy lighter was rolling heavily.

"We're from the *Sandu*," came a hoarse voice through the darkness.

"Who are you?"

"The mate and two of the hands."

"Where is she?"

"On the Lady Rock."

"Bless me, how did she get on to the Lady Rock?"

Silence.

"No harm to passengers or crew?"

"Not yet," was the evasive answer.

"Steamer damaged?"

"Ay. I'm thinking her back's brokken. The passengers are ahl out on the rock."

"Well, we'll go over and fetch them off."

"Is it Mr. Stewart?"

"Yes."

"Are we to go on to Duntroone?"

"No. We'll want your boat; and we'll want you too. Come on board; and we'll tow the boat astern."

It was a difficult business on so rough and dark a night; for the men in the smaller boat had a wholesome fear of the lurching and pitching of this great heavy brute of a thing; but at last they managed it; and the *Firefly* was sent on again, with such speed as she was capable of making. It turned out that the mate had no story to tell. How the *Sanda* had got on to the Lady Rock was all a mystery. Or perhaps he deemed it prudent, in the circumstances, to hold his peace.

Then in course of time they began to make out, through the mirk and the wet, certain minute dots of light, dim and wavering in the distance, and sometimes almost disappearing, as a thick squall of rain would drive by. But when they drew nearer they perceived that certain of these tremulous points of fire appeared to be stationary, while others were moving like mysterious will-o'-the-wisps over the black water; and they guessed that the sailors, furnished with lanterns, were perhaps making such small provision of comfort as was possible for the people huddled together on the reef. And here were two other lights, one red and one green: the port and starboard lights of the stranded ship.

"Well, I'm sure!" exclaimed Mr. Stewart. "She's right on the top of the rock!"

"Ay," said the mate, who was standing by him, "she's well up and over. She's on this side—and lying nearly due east and west."

"Was the man trying to steeplechase her!" the agent demanded—but the mate was discreetly deaf.

Meanwhile the speed of the steam-lighter had been slowed down until she was doing little more than holding her own against the wind and the fierce running tide—the owner having no kind of wish to go nearer that dangerous reef than he could help.

"We'll try the first landing with your boat," said Mr. Stewart to the mate. "Since you came away, you should know the road back. And do not take us too close under the bows of the *Samda*, for she might slip forward even yet."

"If she slips forward a few yards," said the mate, "she'll go straight to the bottom."

"And will you go with us, Allan, lad?" continued Mr. Stewart. "Or will you wait on board the lighter?"

"Well, I would rather go with you," the schoolmaster said, "and take an oar. There'll be somebody wanted up at the bow anyway."

And so, after some delay, the boat was hauled alongside; and they jumped or scrambled into it, and got out the oars, and no doubt were glad enough to shove away from the immediate neighbourhood of the lumbering craft. As yet no figures were discernible on the black reef ahead of them; but the dots of yellow light were there—and they were kept briskly moving: this was the last form of signalling left to the stranded folk, after the rockets had all been expended.

And now, even though they were creeping in under the lee, they could hear the appalling roar of the surf all around these rocks; and they imagined that their coming would not be unwelcome to the castaways. Apparently for their better guidance, those golden glow-worms that had been scattered about now seemed to converge; they appeared to be coming close down to the water; and yet they were kept moving, as if to indicate where some creek had been discovered; while the man at the bow of the boat, as she got closer and closer, from time to time called aft to his companions.

"No so hard, Hughie ! Back-watter, man ! Back-watter, both of you ! No—you pull a stroke, Mr. Henderson !"

"Ay, ay, in here—in here !" shouted the voices from the rock—and the glow-worms were clustered together now, shedding a dull glare on the seaweed and the dark water and on a small group of phantasmal figures.

Well, they were willing hands that were laid on the gunwale of the boat, when the swirl of an eddying wave lifted her near enough to be caught ; and up she went on the slippery seaweed, until she was found to be secure ; then the rescuers stepped out, and Allan got hold of his bundle. It was the strangest sight that met his eyes. The black reef ; the massive black hull of the steamer—chiefly indicated by the obscure illumination still remaining in the ports of the saloon and fore-cabin ; the black bars of the beacon, that rose away up into the pitchy skies ; the black figures that stood about in detached groups, or stepped warily forward through the seaweed to hear what the newcomers proposed to do : all these were surrounded by a wavering, uncertain, half-impenetrable gloom, for the air was thick with spray and rain, and the wind was blowing hard. Presently, however, one or two of the lamps were brought along, and the sombre phantoms began to take more recognisable shape. Here, for example, was Long Lauchie MacIntyre, contentedly seated in a pool of water, and fumbling about his pockets in search of his pipe ; while the man who stood by him (it was Red Murdoch, but he was not of Allan's acquaintance) was gazing out seaward, with a hand held over one of his eyes, doubtless in the hope of reducing to their real number the sailing lights of the rescuing steamer. But the young girl from Kilree ?—how was he to discover which she was ?—for the women were cowering away from the blast, their faces mostly hidden.

"Is there one Barbara Maclean ?" he made bold to ask.

"I am here," said one of those dark figures, in a timid and tearful voice ; and at once he went up to her.

"There's a few things here that your aunt and your cousin have sent out to you," said he, "and I am sure you will be glad of them, for the night is so wet. Yes, indeed, now," he went on, "you must take off your shawl, and I will put it over my arm, and here is a dry one. And here is a

muffler to go round your neck, and a pair of mittens for your hands. For you must not think they were forgetting you—neither Mrs. Maclean nor Jessie would be likely to do that——”

“I am far awch from my own home,” the girl said, with a sob.

“Oh, yes, yes,” said he, in a kindly fashion, “but you are going to another home, and a very friendly home. They could not come out to you; but they let me bring these things out to you; and I am glad to find that matters are no worse. For we will soon have you on board the lighter now, and you will be quite safe.”

In common circumstances he was inordinately shy with women; but this poor creature was quite supine and helpless; and in her eyes—those beautiful Highland eyes—large, dark blue, with raven-black lashes—there were piteous tears. He treated her as if she was a child. By the aid of the nearest lamp, he got out these dry wraps, and substituted them for her clinging wet shawl; he made her put the muffler round her neck, and the mittens on her hands; and then he said:

“Now maybe we will get away in the next boat—or at least you will. And mind your footing. Do not move on the seaweed—do not move until you find that your feet are on the limpets.”—As if it were necessary to teach a West Highland girl how to cross a slippery rock!

However, they struggled along and reached the water’s edge, and, by favour of Mr. Stewart, Allan was allowed to accompany his half-cousin or quarter-cousin in the next boat returning to the *Firefly*. He talked to her a little, to give her courage. He assisted her to get into the plunging and rolling lighter; and there he guided her aft, and procured for her a warm and comfortable seat by the boiler, himself standing by her side, so as not to take up room. And then he would have her partake of the little delicacies that Jess Maclean had sent out for her; but she only shook her head; and he was not importunate.

Of a sudden she looked up, timorously.

“Have you the Gaelic?” she asked.

“Indeed I have!” said he, answering her in that tongue.

Instantly a grateful light leapt to her eyes; and at the

same moment, somehow or other, she put out her hand, and touched his hand, as if thereby she was recognising some bond or current of sympathy between them. It was a trifling little action, perhaps quite involuntary and inadvertent, and meaning nothing at all ; but it thrilled him strangely.

"It is my thanks to you," said she, now speaking in Gaelic—and she had a shy and softly-modulated voice. "It is not every one that would be so kind to a stranger."

"But you are no stranger," said the young schoolmaster, in an encouraging way. "For it is many a time I have heard the Macleans speak of you ; and besides, I am myself a relative of yours, though not of the same name."

And thereupon, to beguile the weary time of waiting, he began and gave her a few particulars about himself, and about his relations with the Macleans, and about their ways and modes of life. She did not respond much ; but she mutely regarded him now and again. Indeed it seemed as if it was not necessary for her to answer him ; her eyes did all that ; they were the most wonderful eyes—it was not merely that they were beautiful with a mystic and pathetic beauty, but they appeared capable of saying anything, without a word spoken from her lips. For the most part, however, her expression was grave and diffident, as she looked at him from time to time, and listened.

And at last all the passengers—the captain, mate, and most of the crew were remaining by the stranded steamer—had been rescued from their perilous position and conveyed on board the *Firefly* ; the blades of the screw began to slash into the tumbling waves ; and the vessel moved slowly forward. No farther adventure befell them until they were all safely landed on Duntroone quay—a sorely wet and bedraggled little assemblage ; and although it was now about one o'clock in the morning, there were plenty of anxious friends and relatives waiting to receive and welcome them. And Mrs. Maclean and Jess would fain have had Allan Henderson come into the house and sit down with them at the cheerful and hospitable board that had been prepared for the entertainment of their cousin from the outer isles. But he refused. For some time back he had been drenched to the skin ; the only thing now for him

was to speed away home, and get to bed. As for the drying of his clothes, well, they would have to take their chance : there was no means of making up a fire, at this hour, in these poor lodgings.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DAY AFTER.

NEXT morning opened tranquil and serene ; a few flakes of saffron cloud that hung high in the heavens hardly moved through the clear expanse. The mists were slowly rising from Mull and Morven, the hill-sides revealing themselves in hues of ethereal rose-grey, the snow-sprinkled peaks not yet visible. From the eastern skies, just over the early smoke of Duntroone, the golden light of the dawn went level across the bay, and touched the tall spars and the hulls of the vessels moored at Ardentrive, and shone warm along the olive-green slopes of Kerrara ; while a small red-sailed boat, coming home from the cod-fishing, made its appearance at the point, creeping along through the steel-blue, rippling sea.

And perhaps it was to refresh his eyes with these beautiful colours, after the black visions of the night—or perhaps it was, more practically, to see what the sun could do in the way of drying his outer garments—that Allan Henderson, before beginning his daily round in the Board School, strolled away round by the quays, and then made up for his favourite plateau on the top of the Gallows Hill. And truly it was a different scene that now met his eyes ! Last night the solitary and commanding feature in all the formless gloom was the bold and steady glare of Lismore lighthouse ; now Lismore lighthouse was an insignificant little grey object, away at the end of the long, low, green island ; while the important things were the ranges of the mountains, velvet-soft in their dappled colours, with faint cloud-shadows here and there—the wide calm spaces of the sea, trembling in pale and liquid azure, with one vivid red

spot of a painted beacon at Kerrara point—the ivied castle on its picturesque rock—the wintry woods of green pine and brown larch—the sunlight glinting cheerfully on this or that window in the town—the broad sweep of the bay, with a scarlet-funnelled steamer coming slowly through the blue, from this lofty pinnacle looking a mere mite of a thing, with a touch of white at its bows. A fair picture—shining, reposeful, benign ; no lurid and ghastly vision of the night, with black phantasms huddled together on a cruel rock, the sombre heavens hurling wind and rain at them, the roar and whirl of the unseen surge all around them.

Yet it was to that darker vision, and to the incidents connected with it, that his mind would return, with a singular and incomprehensible fascination. He gazed abroad upon this wide-stretching and placid panorama with eyes that beheld not. A new element—a perturbing element—had entered into his existence ; something he did not understand ; something nevertheless powerful enough to thrust into the background all his ordinary hopes and ambitions and anxieties, his restless speculations, his heroic or despondent forecasts as to the future. What was this new force, then, that threatened to upset the whole tenor of his life—distracted as that had already sufficiently been ? He knew not ; or he would not confess ; or he feared to think. Happily he could turn his back on the enigma ; and was even compelled to do so ; for yonder in the town, overlooking the squalid playground, stood the dingy grey building where his day's labour was shortly to begin. And so, with his brows knit, and his head thrown a little further forward than usual, the schoolmaster strode away down from this wooded hill ; and ere long, in that depressing and murmuring room, he had once more taken up his unloved toil.

It was some hours thereafter, it was about mid-day, that Lauchie MacIntyre awoke to find himself in a disused hay-loft attached to the distillery. How he had come thither on the preceding night he knew not, nor was there any one to tell him ; but that was a minor question ; for it is to be imagined that as the shoemaker now sat up and looked about him, there was no more sick and penitent man,

bodily and mentally sick and sorry, in all the three kingdoms. Where had he been?—what had he done?—what money had he spent?—nay, what had become of his companion, Red Murdoch?—Red Murdoch, who ought to have gone ashore at Tobermory, but would come on to Salen; and again, after Salen—well, after Salen it was difficult to say anything about Red Murdoch: he seemed to have vanished away in a mysterious manner. Then there was the young girl, Barbara Maclean—and here Long Lanchie's conscience became filled with a vague alarm—what had become of her?—what had he done with her?—whither had she, too, disappeared? He had a dim recollection of her at some point in the Sound of Mull—for the steward had come to ask about some tea for her: perhaps, indeed, the steward had looked after her when the *Sanda* arrived at Duntroone? All the same, as these remorseful pangs kept urging him, it would be better for him to go along to Mrs. Maclean's, just to see how the land might lie.

He rose to his feet with a prolonged sigh that was almost a groan; and, with his ten trembling fingers acting as an ineffectual brush, he tried to remove from his sodden garments the too evident traces of his having passed the night on an unswept floor. Then he left the loft, and with shaky knees descended the flight of wooden steps—fortunately there was no one about. Finally, summoning to him such air of confidence as he could command, he passed along the main street until he came to Mrs. Maclean's shop, which he entered.

"I hope you are very well the day, Mrs. Maclean," said he, rather nervously.

"Oh, yes, indeed," said the widow with her accustomed cheerfulness. "And you yourself? But you are not looking quite so well. Come away in and sit down——"

"No, no, thank you," said he, shrinking back from the possibility of meeting strangers.

"There's no one in," said she. "Not even Jessie—Jessie has gone over to the house."

Thus assured he stepped into the little parlour, and she followed him, leaving the door a bit open, in case a customer should appear.

"It's little wonder you should be looking not quite so

well," she continued, "after such a night as last night. And you'll just take a little drop of something." With which she went to the cupboard.

Now the very soul of Lanchie was crying aloud and in anguish for a glass of whisky; but sternly he held up his hand.

"No, Mrs. Maclean," said he, "I'll no touch it. I wouldna touch a drop. It's a terrible bad thing, whisky. It's the very curse and ruin of the kintry. If I was having my way, I would shut up every public-house in the kingdom; ay, and I would have every distiller put into djile."

All the same, she put the decanter and the glass on the table—though she did not press him further.

"And have you got your things come ashore from the wreck?" she asked.

He looked up, in a dazed and yet cautiously inquisitive manner.

"Ay: the wreck?" he said.

Had there been a wreck, then? And was that the cause of Barbara Maclean's vanishing into the unknown? But here was her aunt sitting quite sprightly and content. And himself?—if there had been a wreck, how was he come safely here?

"It must have been a fearful time for you," the widow continued, unheeding. "And how the captain managed to put the *Sanda* on to the Lady Rock, just passes comprehension: that's what every one is saying—"

"Was the *Sanda* on a rock?" he demanded, in a bewildered fashion.

Happily she mistook the question.

"Oh, yes, she's on the rock still—the high tide has not moved her. But who knows how long she'll be there, if any rough weather comes? And they're saying that if she had struck the rock a few yards to the left, she would not have held at all, but would have gone straight to the bottom. I cannot make it out—for there was no such dreadful bad weather. It was bad weather enough," continued the widow, "that you had out in the west, so I am hearing; and a bad day for the funeral—with such a long way from the house to the seminary."

"Oh, yes, indeed," said the shoemaker, quickly, for here

he was on firmer ground. "Terrible bad weather ; aw, terrible bad weather ; and as you say, Mrs. Maclean, a long way from the house to the cemetery——"

A customer entered the shop, and Mrs. Maclean left the parlour. The moment her back was turned Long Lauchie, overcome by the tragic temptation of the opportunity, hastily seized the decanter, with tremulous fingers poured out a glass of whisky, and gulped it down. When she returned he was beginning to feel a bit reassured : if only now he could find out what had become of the young lass Barbara !

"Mrs. Maclean," said he, tentatively, "it was a bad night for a wreck, was it not ?—very wet and uncomfortable—indeed I'm feeling my clothes a wee thing damp even now——"

"And will you not take a drop of the whisky, then, Lauchlan ?" said the widow, considerably.

"Aw, Mrs. Maclean," said the shoemaker, with great solemnity, "that you could propose such a thing, and me just telling you that whisky was the curse of the kinty ! You have a bad opinion of me if you think I would be touching any such thing ! As sure's death, I would sooner walk barefoot to the top of Ben Cruachan than drink a glass of whisky. But as I was saying : it was a coarse night—and—and the wreck—ay, at the wreck, now—that young lass, your niece—I hope she had plenty round her——"

"Oh, well, indeed," said Mrs. Maclean, "the bundle that Allan Henderson, the schoolmaster, took out to her, was useful enough, no doubt. And it was a friendly thing of the lad to do, seeing that she was a stranger to him. Oh, yes, he is a good lad, he is a kind-hearted lad, is Allan, though he is very stiff-necked, and proud, and ill to manage at times. And when he brought her ashore last night—or rather this morning—and when he brought her up to the house, he would not come in—no—the stubborn chiel that he is !—but he half-promised to look in and see us this evening."

Here, indeed, was welcome news : he began to feel the world more solid beneath his feet.

"Well, it's very glad I am to hear that your niece has

not suffered anything from the shipwreck," Lauchie ventured to say, as he rose to take his departure. "I was looking after her as well as I could—ay—but when there is a wreck—a wreck is a bad thing—a wreck is a terrible bad thing—a man would forget what his own brother was like when there's so many running backwards and forwards and mekkin a noise. And now I must be going home, for they'll be wondering at not seeing me ahl this time."

It was an unfortunate admission.

"Were you not home last night, Lauchlan?" the widow said—her eyes attracted to his clothes, which still showed traces of the hayloft.

He hesitated.

"Well, well—not exactly," said he, "I had to pass the night with a friend. He was very seek; and he wanted me to sit up with him. And I was sitting up with him."

She held the door open for him to pass.

"You'll not take a dram?" said she, finally.

"No, no," he made answer, shaking his head. "No. It would be a bad encouragement for ithers. There's no sich things as that for me." And therewithal he said good-bye, and left the shop, and got out into the open day, his eyes blinking at the stronger light. And perhaps he did go home.

Meanwhile Jess, in her gentle and almost motherly way, had taken under her charge the solitary creature who had been confided to their care; and very glad was she to find that her consin had suffered but little from her recent experiences: no doubt the island-nurtured frame of the girl was pretty well used to cold and wet and considerable spells of fasting. Moreover Barbara Maclean did not at all appear to be too grievously overwhelmed by her bereavement; she hardly ever referred to her father or the funeral; at the present moment, in truth, she seemed mostly concerned about the wooden chest which contained all her little belongings and which had been left on board the *Sanda*.

"But you are sure to get it to-day, Barbara," Jess said, in her persuasive tones. "The lighter is bringing everything ashore from the wreck; and they will send your box up to you. And in the meantime here are my things, and you are welcome to choose just whatever yon like."

The large, dark-blue, pathetic eyes of the girl had been drawn to the two white strips that terminated Jess's sleeves.

"Would you lend me a pair of cuffs like them?" said she—rather slowly, for her English was not fluent. "I was never seeing such beautiful ironing. And do you wear cuffs like that all through the week, and every day in the week?"

"Why not?" said Jess, with a laugh. "I iron them myself. But I will give you a far nicer pair of cuffs than these, Barbara, yes, and a set of tortoiseshell sleeve-links. For, you see, Allan Henderson, that brought you home last night, he is coming in this evening, and perhaps Mr. McFadyen, a friend of ours, as well; and you must be looking very nice and smart. And I am sure you will give a word of thanks to Allan, for his kindness of last night. He is rather a shy and proud and sensitive lad, and not caring to say much for himself before strangers; and a word of thanks would please him, I am sure of that. Mind this. Barbara, it is not every one that Mr. Stewart would have allowed to go out with him in the lighter; so you were fortunate to have some one to look after you on such a night."

For a second the beautiful eyes of the girl—that seemed to say so much, even when they were really saying nothing at all—were raised to her companion's face; but presently she had withdrawn them, inattentive.

"Will you be going out now, Jessie?" said she. "And will you walk down to the quay, until I see if my box is come over from the wreck?"

Jess at once and good-naturedly assented; they made such trifling preparations as were necessary; and in a short space of time the two cousins were passing along the main street of Duntrroone.

CHAPTER VII.

A CEILIDH.

EVENTUALLY the box was found and sent along to the house ; and, on the return of the two girls, it was opened ; and Jess Maclean was somewhat diffidently invited to look over her cousin's small stock of millinery treasures. These were not sumptuous ; for the most part they had been procured at the solitary 'merchant's' shop in Kilree, where feminine finery had to be sought for amidst a heterogeneous display of brown soap, candles, figs, sweetmeats, patent starch, paraffin lamps, and the like ; they had seen a good deal of weather out there in the west ; and now, as Barbara produced them for inspection, it was with a growing sense of disappointment.

"Everything you have seems so neat and clean and so stiffly-ironed," she said to her cousin, almost resentfully.

"Well, then," said Jess, with the utmost good-nature, "you must just take any of my things that are of use to you. And especially when there are visitors coming to the house——"

"They would be thinking I should be in mourning," said Barbara.

"And I am sure they will think nothing of the kind !" responded Jess. "They know, as the rest of us know, that it is very easy for rich people to buy black silks and black bonnets and things of that kind ; but it is not so easy for poorer people ; and where could any one get mourning at Knockalanish ? As for Allan Henderson, the schoolmaster," Jess went on, with a demure laugh, "it is of little consequence what you wear. He would never see it. If you were dressed as a beggar in the streets, or like the Queen on her throne, he would not know the difference. When he fixes those great eyes of his on you—like burning coals—it isn't your dress he is heeding ; he is trying to understand what you are thinking—that is all he cares about."

"You talk a good deal about the schoolmaster, Jessie," observed Barbara.

Jess Maclean flushed quickly, and turned her head away ; but she betrayed no anger.

"I think that every one will be talking of him," said she, quietly, "before many years are over."

And thus it was with Jessie's help, and with the loan of a few trifling articles of adornment, that the Highland cousin was got ready for the evening, and very smart and trim and effective she looked. She was indeed a beautiful creature, quite apart from those wonderful, mysterious, appealing eyes ; her features were refined, and even distinguished ; she had the fresh, clear, healthily-tinted complexion that not unfrequently in the western isles is found in conjunction with raven-black hair ; and when she moved, her step was graceful. Her hands, it is true, bore evidence of rough kitchen-work ; but she did not seem conscious of this defect ; nay, she appeared rather inclined to put them forward a little, so that she could better admire the pair of extremely pretty cuffs and the tortoiseshell links that Jess had given her.

Of the two visitors the first to arrive was Mr. Peter McFadyen, who, for a second or so, on being introduced to the stranger, was somewhat disconcerted and taken aback. For this was not at all the mere crofter's lass he had expected to meet—this young lady in becoming attire, whose manner, if shy and reserved, at least betrayed no great embarrassment. But Peter prided himself on being a man of the world ; he had soon recovered his self-confidence ; he would hear from herself further details of the shipwreck ; and, finding that she was somewhat silent—the conversation being now in English—he proceeded to give authoritative views on tides, currents, beacons, and the proper navigation of Duntroone harbour, yet with a touch of jocosity now and again, to show his lightness of heart. Barbara Maclean listened mutely, and sometimes she looked at her cuffs.

Then the blithe little widow appeared, the shop having been shut ; and she was almost immediately followed by the young schoolmaster, who, after having gravely greeted these friends, seemed in a measure disposed to keep away from this newly-found half-cousin of his. He sate some-

what removed ; and if by chance, or by some subtle instinct, his eyes were raised to regard the face of the girl, they were almost instantly withdrawn, as if he were afraid. Of course this was Mr. McFadyen's opportunity. With these women-folk to impress, he was called upon for display ; he was determined to shine ; he would show them he could talk about other matters than golf. And now—while Mrs. Maclean was stirring up the fire to briskness, and Jess was laying the snow-white table-cloth—it was the marvels of modern science that he had got on to ; and in particular he was informing them—as if the illustration were his own—of the astronomers having brought within their ken stars so distant that if, on the day of the battle of Waterloo, news of the victory could have been dispatched to one of these suns, the telegram would not even now have arrived.

“Ay, and that's not all !” he exclaimed—as a premonitory odour of minced collops and onions wandered in from the kitchen. “They're saying there's no end—no end to the universe—you might go on for ever and ever and only come to more worlds and more worlds, and more space and more space—infinite space—infinite—Just think of it—isn't it terrible to realise——”

“But you can't realise it,” said Allen, with a touch of his scornful impatience.

“You can't what ?” demanded the town-councillor.

“It is unthinkable,” said the schoolmaster, briefly. “The mind cannot conceive the idea of infinite space.”

“Ah ?” said Mr. McFadyen, with an inquiring glance. “Ah ? You've got to imagine a boundary ?—You can't help thinking of a boundary ? Is that it ?”

“Yes, but you're no further forward that way either,” said the younger man, imperturbably. “For you can't imagine a final boundary : if you think of a boundary you must think of something outside the boundary : you build a wall, but there must be something outside the wall as well as in. And so it goes on ; and the mischief is that you can neither think of space having an end nor yet of its being endless——”

Peter looked a little dazed—and also suspicious ; but he solved the difficulty by breaking into a loud laugh.

“Is that metaphysics ?” he cried. “Is that metaphysics,

Allan ? Dod, man, you're a clever chiel ; and the School Board 'll have to be raising your salary ! An annual increment of £5 is no half enough."

"I'm sure I'm not caring how many worlds there are," said the contented little widow, as she brought the cruet-stand and put it on the table. "This is the only one that's handy ; and I doubt whether a better one ever was made. Draw in your chair, Barbara, my lass ; and you, Allan ; and you, Mr. McFadyen. It is well for us that we are under a roof, and with a good fire—and not out on the Lady Rock."

Minced collops and onions, a dish of spinach garnished with boiled eggs, and bottled stout : these were the materials of the repast ; and a bountiful feast it must have appeared in the eyes of the young lass from the Knockalanish croft. The gay little widow proved a pertinacious hostess ; she would take no refusals, would make no concessions to shamefacedness ; '*what's good for the Jura factor will do no harm to Fleecy McPhail*,' she said, as she helped herself and others, with here a rallying word, and there a friendly remonstrance. Indeed this small party that had been brought together to give Barbara Maclean a welcome on her home-coming performed its duty well ; surely she must have perceived that it was not amongst strangers she had fallen ; only the young schoolmaster remained somewhat aloof and reserved, and of him she did not take much notice. Then again, when Mrs. Maclean, in her frank and off-hand way, came to discuss the girl's position and prospects, she showed a tact that she had not always at command. She would not have Barbara look upon herself in the light of a dependent. Not at all. Serious duties would be expected of her. She would have to manage this house, for example—the young thing Kirsty was hardly to be trusted. And there was more than that. It appeared that the Macleans, mother and daughter, were in the habit of contracting with the tobacco-manufactory for considerable quantities of Lurgan twist ; and this they dispatched in lesser consignments to the 'merchants' in the outer isles. The correspondence attached to this part of the business was carried on by Jess ; but Jess knew little Gaelic, and could write none at all ; whereas, now, if Barbara

would undertake to translate these letters into Gaelic, it would be a great advantage and recommendation to a good many of the customers with whom English was practically a foreign tongue. And what had Barbara to say to all this?

"I am sure," the girl said, speaking rather slowly, as was her wont, "that I am very willing to do anything that I can do. But I cannot write the Gaelic. I know it very well—oh, yes—better than English a great deal; but I have never tried to write it. It was always English they were having in the school at Kilree."

And now, and almost for the first time this evening, Allan Henderson addressed her.

"If that is all," said he, "there is no trouble. It would be a very easy thing for you to learn the Gaelic spelling, when you know the language well. You would not find it very difficult, after you had got the rules." He hesitated—for the large, beautiful eyes were regarding him calmly, perhaps even curiously. "If you would like," he went on, "I would come along in the evening to give you some lessons. An hour each evening would do. It is a pity you should know Gaelic so well, and not be able to write it."

She did not answer him at the moment: it was Jess Maclean who looked up, startled. For could this really be Allan Henderson, who ordinarily was so backward, or impatient, or scornfully indifferent wherever young women were concerned, yet who now proposed to devote an hour each evening in the week to this solitary converse? And that was most assuredly what this private tuition would mean. No one else wanted to learn Gaelic spelling. And would the class, consisting of teacher and pupil, be held in the house here, while she and her mother would be over the way in the shop?

At this point Peter McFadyen interposed in a stormily good-humoured fashion.

"Mrs. Maclean," he cried, "I call you to order. Surely there has been enough of business—enough of business; and I would not have Miss Barbara bothered with threats of lessons the moment she sets foot in your house. It's all very well for you, Allan, my lad; everyone to his trade;

but at the proper time ; and the proper time is not every time. No, no ; there are other things ; there are amusements ; we cannot have all work and no play ; I may not be very well skilled in metaphysics, but I know when we should have a dance and a song and a merry-making, to keep the game of life going. And let me see : what is there to the fore now——”

He appeared to be summoning up to his mind the innumerable gaieties of Duntroone in the winter.

“Well, now, for example, there’s the Gaelic Choir to-morrow night—the practising in the Drill-Hall—and we could not do better than go there, to hear the practising for Mrs. McAskill’s soiree. I’m going ; I must go ; I must make my voice heard to-morrow evening——”

“Oh, are you going to sing, Mr. McFadyen ?” said the widow, encouragingly.

“To sing ?” he repeated. “Well—well—no—for I am not one of the Choir. But as for a song,” he proceeded, refusing to confess himself abashed, “if it is a song you would like, well, when we are round the fire in a little while, I will try a song, just as if we were at an old-fashioned *ceilidh*.* There is not half enough of spirit among the younger men of the present day——”

“And do you call yourself anything else than one of the younger men !” the widow protested, in a kind fashion.

“Why, in the former days,” continued Mr. McFadyen, affecting not to have overheard this agreeable compliment, “when you were at supper, and there were fowls at supper, and if you found a particular bone, you would send it to such or such a one, and he would have to make verses in Gaelic there and then. So I have heard. I am not good at the Gaelic myself ; but as for a song, I would not spoil any merry party by refusing—not at all ! And what I was saying was this—to-morrow night, when the Gaelic Choir are at the Drill-Hall I am going to put a question to them ; I am indeed. What kind of songs are they going to sing at Mrs. McAskill’s soiree—that’s what I want to know. Dod’s bless my soul, is there any use in being muizzerable ? Is there any use in being muizzerable, Mrs. Maclean ?——”

* *Ceilidh*—a friendly gathering.

"Well, I never found any myself," said the little widow, suavely. "And I'm told that giving way to it is fearful bad for the congestion——"

"There's some truth in that anyway," observed the schoolmaster, in a kind of grim undertone.

"Now what's the favourite songs all through the West Highlands?" demanded Peter, indignantly. "I'll tell you, then. There's three in particular. There's the *Fear a Bhata*—the Farewell to the Boatman; there's the Farewell to Fuinary; there's Farewell to Mackrimmon—all of them Farewells; and are we to have nothing but Farewells and Farewells and Farewells, when a few friends have met together, to pass a merry hour or two? And I know the Choir have plenty of other songs. I can see them in their own books. If I cannot make quite clear sense out of the Gaelic, at least I can read the translation; and there's plenty of sensible songs, instead of Farewells and Farewells."

He suddenly turned to his neighbour.

"Miss Barbara," said he, "do you know the '*Return, my darling*'?"

The colour came swiftly to the face of the young Highland girl on her being thus unexpectedly addressed.

"No I do not," she said, with downcast eyes.

"It is the *O, till, a leannain*, Barbara," said Jess—who was a member of the Choir.

"Well, now, there is a sensible song!" continued McFadyen, with spirit. "Some night I will sing it to you—at present I am not sure of the air. But listen to words like this—

*'If you on my dear one should gaze, should gaze,
If you were to hear what she says, she says,
If you heard my pretty
One singing her ditty
Your bosom would get in a blaze, a blaze.'*

That's sense. That's sensible. That doesna belong to the devil's clan of Farewells! And I must make my voice heard to-morrow evening at the Choir—oh, yes, indeed. We are going to have a merry evening at Mrs. McAskill's—and it is useless lamenting for Mackrimmon, and Mackintosh, and Lovat, and the rest of them. And sure I am

that if Miss Barbara here will go with us, there will be an invite for her too ; yes, yes ; Mrs. McAskill is an old friend of mine ; and my friends are her friends. We'll make up a little party, and we'll all go together ; and I'm thinking it might be just as well if I brought a machine."

Nor did Peter, in his determination to keep things going gaily, forget his promise about singing them a song, when they had left the table and were seated in a cosy semicircle round the fire. The others had forgotten, it is true ; for Allan Henderson had chanced to ask of the widow the origin of a saying she had accidentally used—"Step for step to thee, old woman, and the odd step to Ewen" ; and she was telling them the story : how Ewen Cameron of Lochiel was returning home late one night ; how he was followed by a witch, who tried to overtake him ; how he made use of this phrase, and held on his way successfully, keeping one step in advance of her, until he reached the ferry ; how he had jumped into the boat, while the ferryman drove the witch-hag back ; how she had called to Lochiel 'My heart's desire to thee, dear Ewen !' and how he, divining her purpose, had called in return 'Thy heart's desire to the big rock yonder'—whereupon the big rock split into two pieces, visible even unto this day at Ballachulish Ferry. To all this Jess listened half-laughing—she was familiar with most of her mother's old-world sayings and tales ; but Barbara's eyes were intent and awe-stricken ; and it was the expression of her face, rather than the legend, that held the schoolmaster's attention fascinated and enthralled. Of course the town-councillor was too polite to interrupt. But as soon as Mrs. Maclean had finished her narrative, he put his hand over his mouth and coughed significantly.

"It is not so easy," said he, "to sing without an accompaniment ; but a promise is a promise ; and I will do my best."

Whereupon he began, in a curious falsetto voice that seemed to come from just behind his teeth, instead of from his chest or throat :

'The sun has gane down o'er the lofty Ben Lomond'

—this was his song ; and he was evidently proud of his performance ; for he took plenty of time, and introduced

all manner of ornate trills of execution, that could only have been acquired by long practice—

*‘And left the red clouds to preside o’er the scene,
While lanely I stray in the calm simmer gloamin’,
To muse on sweet Jessie, the flower o’ Dumblane.’*

The dog!—pretending to sing the praises of Jessie the Flower of Dumblane, when it was as clear as noonday that it was Jessie the Flower of Duntroone he had in his mind. However, there was no covert look or smile; it was too serious a matter for that; for now when he came to the second half of the verse he fairly outdid himself—those flourishes and grace-notes were so abundant that the tune got hopelessly lost amongst them—never had words been so embroidered—

*‘How sweet is the brier, wi’ its soft faulding blossom,
And sweet is the birk, wi’ its mantle o’ green;
Yet sweeter and fairer, and dear to this bosom,
Is lovely young Jessie, the flower o’ Dumblane.
Is lovely young Jessie, Is lovely young Jessie,
Is lovely young Jessie, the flower o’ Dumblane.’*

Nay, when he arrived at the final repetition of the phrase ‘lovely young Jessie’—which is rather high-pitched in the music, he actually opened his mouth, and the consequence was a prolonged and shrill scream: indeed so effective and overwhelming was the climax of this last line that the widow, carried away by her enthusiasm, called out ‘Well done!—well done!’ and clapped her hands.

“Mother,” said Jess, blushing furiously, “there’s more verses!”

“No, no,” said Mr. McFadyen, modestly, “I’ll not sing any more the night. I got into rather a high key—and—and my voice is a little out of practice——”

“You did well—you did just famously!” the widow maintained. But Peter had given evidence of his possession of musical powers, and was blandly satisfied.

Altogether it appeared to be a very happy evening for every one concerned, though, to be sure, the young girl from the outer isles remained distant and silent. And to the young schoolmaster that silence of hers was far more impressive than anything else could have been; it accorded

with a certain indefinable quality, a certain mysterious element of remoteness that seemed to surround her. And what was the origin, he asked himself as he wandered away homeward through the sleeping town—but not to his books; his thoughts were too perturbed and quick-changing for any application to books—what was the origin of this strange influence she appeared to convey, even without a single spoken word? Was it the mere sense of her loneliness? Or had it anything to do with the circumstances in which he had first encountered her—finding the solitary and forsaken creature on that black reef, with the darkness all around, and the noise of hurrying waters? And what was it that her eyes said, that no mortal eyes had ever said to him before? Those beautiful blue deeps under the raven lashes—so calm, so still, so mystic in their very apathy—did they not bring some revelation, some message wholly apart from mere human emotions and affections?

“They seem to speak of the sea and of the night,” he said to himself, in the long and sleepless hours of recalling and remembering.

CHAPTER VIII.

BARBAROSSA.

THE very next day, to Jess Maclean’s astonishment, Allan Henderson walked into the shop: it was a most unusual hour for him to make an appearance.

“There is a half-holiday at the school,” he said, “the Head-Master has had great news about his son who is at Oxford. And I was thinking, Jessie, if you were free for an hour or so, you might like to go across to Kerrara, and climb up the hill, and find out if anything further has happened to the *Sanda*. I have got Angus McIsaac’s boat—it’s down at the slip——”

Jess Maclean’s kindly grey eyes were lit up with pleasure: in Duntroone it is a special compliment and mark of favour for a young man to ask a young woman to go for a row

with him. And this suggestion about the *Sanda* was obviously the merest excuse : every one knew what was happening to the *Sanda* ; she was found to be irremovably jammed on to the rock, and irretrievably damaged ; and the steam-lighter was kept engaged in bringing ashore any of her fittings that might be of value—before the next gale came along to hammer her to bits.

“Well, I am not so busy,” said Jess, laying down her book-keeping pen. “There is little doing at this time of the year.”

“And would your cousin Barbara care to go too ?” the young schoolmaster added, somewhat diffidently.

The light vanished from Jess Maclean’s face.

“I should think that Barbara had had enough of boats for a while,” she said, somewhat coldly.

Yet she she was the soul of goodhumour and unselfishness. The hurt and disappointed look did not last a second. Was it to be wondered at that he should have conceived a sudden interest in this beautiful creature who had come into their little circle, and who had, by fortune of accident, made especial claim on his attention and pity ?

“Barbara ?” said Jess, after a moment, in her usual bland way. “Oh, yes, indeed, I am sure she will be glad to go ; and I will run across the way and tell her—if you will step into the parlour and talk to my mother for a moment or two, while Barbara and I are getting ready.” For there was no kind of grudging in this woman’s nature : if it was really on account of Barbara that he had made this proposal—well, Barbara was the more fortunate.

Now Barbara did not respond to this invitation with the gratitude that might have been expected ; but Jess at last induced her to go ; and when both the girls were ready, they crossed over to the shop, and Allan and they proceeded down to the beach, where the boat was awaiting them. They took their places in the stern ; he followed in, and got hold of the oars ; then they shoved off, and he set out to pull them across the bay. On the whole it was a most auspicious start ; for if the morning had been somewhat squally, all the world was now a blaze of splendour ; the Mull mountains, clear to the top, were of an almost summer-like blue ; summer-like was the blue of the lapping and

flashing waters around them ; while between these brilliant breadths of colour ran the long spur of Kerrara, its russet and russet-yellow slopes basking in the sun. It is true that Jess, knowing the climate, had brought a thick plaid with her ; it now lay unheeded over their knees.

And for a considerable time all went well, and they made good progress across to the island. Allan was a capable oarsman ; the tall young schoolmaster, despite his slight stoop, possessed a wiry frame ; and everybody along this coast can handle a boat. But by-and-bye, and almost imperceptibly, the aspect of things began to alter a little.

"Allan," said Jess, "I think we are going to have a shower."

"No, no—no shower," said he, confidently ; for of course he was looking back to the land—and there all was placid sunlight, from the white houses dotted along the terraced cliffs out to the ivied castle at the point.

Jess laughed.

"Allan," said she, "where is the island of Mull ?"

He turned his head. There was no island of Mull. The mountains of tender, ethereal rose-purple and azure had all disappeared ; and in their place there was a far-stretching film of silvery-grey, entirely shutting out the world beyond.

"And what's that down the Sound ?" Jess demanded again.

He turned and looked in the other direction. Off the mouth of Loch Feochan a broad black band lay on the water—a band of almost inky hue ; but even as they regarded it, it began to resolve itself—it came creeping stealthily along, leaving a vague indistinctness in its wake. Then Kerrara itself appeared to undergo gradual transformation ; the low-lying hills took loftier and mystic forms ; through this ever-advancing veil they looked strange and remote. And was there not some darkness assembling overhead ?—some pervading gloom all round ? The blue had gone from the sea.

"Quick !—quick !" cried Jess—and she opened out the thick plaid and threw it round Barbara and herself, the two of them crouching together, their heads bent down.

Then with a cold and angry swirl of wind came the first rattle of the rain—splashing on thwarts and gunwale, and

hissing on the leaden sea ; the gloom around them increased ; the island they were making for seemed to recede and recede, until it appeared to be a hopeless distance away ; and then again—in about another couple of minutes—they could descry that same island of Kerrara shining a beautiful golden-green behind the grey folds of the wet ; the world lightened and still further lightened ; and as they once more emerged into blue water and warm sunshine, behold ! the mountains of Mull had returned—the velvet-hued shoulders of purple and soft rose-grey showing along their summits a slight sprinkling of snow, left by the swift-drifting shower.

And now they were come to Ardentrive, the solitary and secluded bay in which the yachts of this part of the coast are laid up for the winter. Very forlorn and ghostly looked those silent, dismantled vessels ; yet they were interesting in a way ; it was like walking past empty rooms, thinking of vanished glories. And as they went from one to the other, Allan chanced to notice that the gangway of a certain schooner had not been properly fixed down.

“Would you like to go on board and have a look about the deck ?” said he to his companions. “It would not be difficult.”

“If you’re sure there’s no one on the yacht,” said Jess, doubtfully.

“There cannot be,” he pointed out. “There’s no boat astern. And who would be on board a yacht at this time of year ?”

And yet, when at length he had clambered over the gunwale, and opened the gangway, and had got the two girls hauled up on deck, and when they began to peer about, there was some unusual symptoms observable.

“I never saw a boat left like this,” said he—for everybody in Duntroone knows something about boats. “Look at the tarpaulin of the skylight—it has been taken off and thrown back again ; what is to prevent a gust of wind from blowing it overboard ?”

He pursued his investigations.

“Look here,” he called again, “the doors of the companion-way have been left open. Let us go down and see the saloon !”

He shoved back the hatch of the companion-way, and proceeded to descend the steps, the two girls rather timorously following. Indeed there was something uncanny in finding themselves in possession of this deserted ship; moreover, beneath them was a vague and mysterious gloom, for the tarpaulin, loose as it might be, quite sufficiently covered the deck skylight.

But the next moment this indefinite apprehension had given way to the most violent alarm and terror. For no sooner had Allan reached the open door of the saloon than he suddenly stopped short, and instinctively threw out both arms, as if to bar the further progress of the women.

"What in the name of God is that!" he exclaimed, gazing with awe-stricken eyes into the dim obscurity.

"It's a dead man!" cried Barbara, with a piercing shriek. "Come away—Jess!—Jess!"

But Jess was too terrified to move: she could only stare into the semi-darkness at the ghastly object that there presented itself. And Allan, also, stood and stared—wondering whether they had stumbled into dream-land, and broken in upon the slumbers of the Emperor Barbarossa. For at the further end of the sombre saloon, half-reclining against the cushions, and apparently dead asleep, there was an upright figure clad in a white mantle; some kind of crown surmounted his brows; and on the table before him lay a metal instrument, brass or gold it seemed to be in the prevailing dusk. The red-bearded sleeper did not stir or show any sign of life; and the silence around him was as the silence of the grave.

"Jess!—Jess!" said Barbara, with ashen lips. "Come away—it is a work of the devil!"

But Jess, trembling though she was, would not leave Allan; she felt safer standing by him than in trying to flee from the neighbourhood of that appalling phantasm; unknown to herself she had put her hand on the young man's arm, and would have dragged him back, when he advanced a step.

"Who are you?—and what are you?" he demanded, in a loud voice.

The white figure slowly moved; a pallid face appeared to regard the intruders; then of a sudden the unknown

snatched up the sceptre-looking instrument that lay on the table, and brandished it before him.

"Away, away!" he called shrilly, in Gaelic. "It's I that will not be satisfied till the Bay of Duntroone is filled with blood—with blood!—with blood! Ten thousand down from the Gallows Hill—ten thousand hurled over the Minard cliffs—sweep them, sweep them into the sea—till they know the power of the King! The power of the King!—that must walk on the neck of his enemies, and splash the lintels of his door with their blood, till not one of them be left in the land! Hurl them over—crush them—mangle them—slaves, away now, and do my bidding!—for the bloody slaughter shall not cease till the going down of the sun!"

In his frantic gesticulation, the red beard, which was merely a strip of cow's hide, got disarranged, and fell to the floor.

"It's Niall Gorach,*" cried Jess in amazement.

But the poor half-witted lad, hearing this real voice, began dimly to perceive that these strangers were actual human beings, not the ghosts and hallucinations he had been accustomed to command, in his madder moments, from this throne of state. He peered curiously at them, in a frightened way, and now he was all trembling.

"Have you come for me?" he said, in pitiful and whimpering tones—and he humbly laid down his sceptre, which was none other than the brass poker belonging to the stove.

"Why, how did you get here?" demanded Allan.

"I took a boat from the Corran shore," he answered—looking furtively and apprehensively from one to the other in this obscure twilight.

"And where did you get the oars for her?"

"I took a piece of wood from the Dunchoillie fence—and—and I watched the tides."

"And what have you done with her now?"

"I shoved her away."

"And left yourself to starve! Why, how long have you been on board this yacht?"

"I am not knowing—a long time, I think—many

* Half-witted Neil.

thousands of people were coming to see me——” But here he checked himself ; his visionary kingdom was over ; and the world of fact and substance had found him.

“ And have you had anything to eat and drink ? ”

“ I brought a bag of meal and a cask of water,” he said ; and then he added, in an appealing way : “ I will give you some if you will not hurt me, or put me in jail.” Nay, so abject and penitent was he, that he took the tinselly crown from his forehead and timidly placed it on the table : it was the last sign and symbol of his abdication.

Well, they were not disposed to be too hard on the poor wretch, whose royal government of spectral armies, in this solitary cabin, could not have done much harm to anybody ; and, indeed, as it turned out, Niall was the means, the unintentional means, of doing Allan Henderson an excellent good turn this afternoon. For of course they had to take him with them—after they had dispossessed him of his blanket-robe and returned it to a locker, and after they had shut up and made secure everything on board the yacht as well as they could, with some comments on the negligence of caretakers. Then they pulled ashore and landed on Kerrara, leaving Niall in charge of the boat drawn up on the beach. They next proceeded to climb the nearest hill from which they might have a view of the distant Lady Rock, this being the ostensible aim of their excursion. It was, in truth, very little they could see of the unfortunate *Sanda* beyond a touch of red that revealed her funnel ; however, they had come to look at the steamer ; and, now that they had accomplished their object, there was nothing for them but to go away home again—Allan could find no further excuse for prolonging this all too delightful lingering and its secret and magnetic association.

Of a sudden Jess Maclean, who was a sharp-eyed lass, began to giggle, and then to laugh outright.

“ Do you know what has happened ? ” she said. “ Where is your boat, Allan ? ”

The schoolmaster wheeled round. There was no doubt about what had happened. The young rascal Niall, seizing his opportunity, had shoved off, jumped into the boat, and was now making for the mainland, as hard as ever he could pull.

“The scoundrel !” said Allan—not a little disconcerted. “But it is no matter. Angus MacIsaac will catch him when he gets ashore, and Angus will bring the boat back for us.”

“Oh, do you think so ?” said Jess, with merriment in her pretty grey eyes. “Well, now, do you see where the daft lad is going ? For he is not so daft as to try landing at the quay or any of the slips ; no, no ; he is making for the little bay at Dunchoillie, and as soon as he has got ashore, he will escape away through the woods. Allan, how many miles is it we’ll have to walk to the ferry ?”

Clearly this was now what stared them in the face. Other hope for them there was none. They waited a long time to see if any sane creature should chance to capture the runaway, and have the understanding to send back the boat ; but nothing of the kind occurred ; and so they set out—Allan secretly rejoicing—to walk away over the rough island to the ferry that crosses Kerrara Sound.

He bore Niall no ill-will for having played them this trick. The world was full of wonder and a subtle fascination all through the hours of this enchanted afternoon ; and when eventually they got across to the mainland there were more of magic spells ; for they walked home through a lambent twilight, with a crescent moon of clear gold nearly overhead ; while far away in the west, high above the mystic glooms and phantom-shapes of the Mull hills, there was a stormy glare of rose-pink, that sent a warm flush across the now approaching Duntroone, its houses, and woods, and scant gardens. Yes, and all his life seemed likewise to have burst into flame : whether a consuming flame it was for the inscrutable Fates to determine and declare.

CHAPTER IX.

PROBLEMS AND DREAMS.

Now on the Sabbath day it was the custom of the good folk of Duntroone, excepting the ultra-strict amongst them, to permit themselves a little walk along the sea-front after morning service ; and this was the next opportunity to which the schoolmaster could look for resuming—without any appearance of intrusive haste—his acquaintance with the wonderful stranger from the outer isles : perchance in the vague hope of inveigling Jess and her to go with him for some brief landward stroll. But alas ! for these fond desires. On the Saturday evening there was a filmy and mysterious halo round the crescent moon ; an hour or two later the wind began to rise—with a vague premonitory howl ; before midnight a full gale was raging, shaking the house to its very foundations ; and through the long dark there was a clattering of windows and a succession of deluges of rain that told of what was happening outside. Then his first despairing glimpse of the new day seemed to say that all was over. The driven and turbulent sea was of a livid green, with the white crests of the chasing waves whirled aloft and scattered in spindrift ; the water was surging heavily along the quays and springing high in foam ; the roadways were deep in mud ; and a solitary pedestrian, a woman, with her head butted down, and her ineffectual waterproof blown up into a black balloon, was being dragged hither and thither as she strove against the gusts of the storm. A cheerless prospect, truly ; for Duntroone, on a wet Sunday, is the wettest-looking place in all the wild and wet West Highlands.

Nevertheless, the weather was not likely to imprison the young schoolmaster ; out-of-doors could be no colder than this fireless and miserable room of his ; besides, he was restless, ill-at-ease, and longing to be away in free and open solitude ; and so, making some inward excuse about having a look round to see if there was any chance of the day

bettering, he set forth, and eventually found himself climbing to the summit of the Gallows Hill. There he made sure he would have all the world to himself alone.

But it was not so. To his astonishment he discovered that he had been forestalled. Lauchie MacIntyre, the shoemaker, was seated on the bench at the foot of the flagstaff.

"Well, Lauchlan," said he, "you're early astir. And what's brought you up here?"

"My head is not so well," said Lauchlan, sadly, and he took his cap off and laid it on his knees. "And I thought there would be a fine cold wind blowing on the hill."

"Maybe you had a little drop last night, then?" Allan suggested.

The melancholy-visaged shoemaker glanced reproachfully at the younger man.

"Aw, Mr. Henderson, that you would think the likes of that of me!—me that's a Rechabite, and was at a Band of Hope meeting only the night before last. There's no such things as that for me—no, no. Now look at this: there's many a man would have tekken to drink long ago in my place. There's many a man would have tekken to drink when his wife run aweh from him. But not me—not me; says I to myself 'Lauchie, let the duvvle go, and welcome to her.' And this one and that was saying I should go through to Fort William, and bash the head of that little bandy-legged carpenter; but says I to myself 'No, no; if he's willing to tek up with a duvvle like that, it is you, Lauchie, that is well rid of them both, and be tammed to them!' What would I be going to Fort William for? It's not to Fort William I would be going, when I might have to bring her back again!"

"Yes, I've heard you were a married man," said Allan, absently. And he did not go on his way, as he had purposed doing, to secure silence and solitude for himself. He sate down on the bench, beside the shoemaker. For here at least was a human being, who had come through, in however blind and bleared a fashion, certain of the great crises and experiences of life—had perhaps even, unknown to himself, been face to face with problems and mysteries. What, for example, was the origin of this disenchantment

and repulsion that he had so freely confessed ? And Allan had no fear of making any humiliating or disturbing discoveries. It was the truth he wanted, seen from whatever side. He was well aware that a Sancho Panza element exists in human nature, and that not to its detriment : the gargoyle does not detract from the majesty of the cathedral.

"Yet I warrant," said he to Long Lauchie, "that you sang a different song when she was your sweetheart—when you believed her to be the finest creature in all the country—when you cared for nothing, for nothing in the world, so much as to see her eyes look kindly at you when you came near. Isn't that so ? Am I right ?" he went on, seeing that the dejected shoemaker was silent. "I'm thinking there was a time when you wouldn't have contentedly seen her go away with another man. No ; you would rather have been for breaking the head of any man that wanted even to be a little friendly with her. There must have been a time when the madness was on you. They tell me that when a man sees the one woman in all the world that he must have for his wife, it is a kind of madness that comes over him——"

"A madness ?" said Lauchlan, gloomily. "Ay. There was ten days of it. Her father he keepit a public-house in Tobermory ; and when I came to myself at the end of the ten days, they were saying that I had promised to marry Jean. Ay, they were saying that. And mebbe I had. And mebbe I had not. But it was of little matter ; for her father he was a decent man ; and there was ahlways a glass for a friend ; and there was a talk of a fine wedding—so I said no more."

Tinkle-tankle—tinkle-tankle went the bell of the Catholic chapel ; and one or two small dark figures began to appear in the distant thoroughfares.

"But no doubt you hoped for the best," continued Allan. "And what was't, think you, made the marriage turn out ill ?"

"The drink," replied Long Lauchie, with mournful resignation. "She was just like the rest. Ah! the weemen are alike. They're ahl alike. They're ahl at the drink, or worse. There's a cousin of mine that is a gamekeeper over

on Loch Awe-side, and he says the two classes that mek ahl the mischief of the kinty are weemen and meenisters, and that it's a pity there does not break out a grouse-disease among them to sweep them ahl aweh. Ay, indeed."

It was without anger that Lauchlan delivered himself of these quite desperate views of life and feminine human nature: he had escaped from the toils, and was merely a passive spectator now.

"And do you mean to say," Allan demanded, "that you allowed your wife to run away from you without making the least effort to bring her back?"

"Well, now," said the shoemaker, with greater animation, "I will just tell you what happened that day, and I will ask you if I did not do right. I was down at the North Quay, with a friend of mine that was going to Ballachulish, and we were waiting for the *Fusilier* to come over from the South Quay. And when the *Fusilier* was brought alongside, then one of the lads of the steamer he comes running up the gangway, and he says 'Lauchie, do you know that your wife is in the fore-caybin?' 'No,' says I, 'I do not.' 'Well she is,' says he, 'and him that's along with her is MacKillop, the carpenter, from Fort William; and I'm thinking it's not ahl right, from the look of them.' 'And do you tell me now,' says I, 'that my wife is rinning aweh with MacKillop the carpenter?' 'It is not for me to answer such a question,' says he. 'It is for you to come on board and get hold of your wife.' 'Is it?' says I. 'Then I will see her tammed first. If she's rinning aweh with the bandy-legged carpenter, let the duvvle go and welcome!' Then says Johnnie: 'They are carrying a big bundle between them.' Well, at that, Mr. Henderson, at that something came over me. 'Johnnie, lad,' says I, 'come aweh down quick to the fore-caybin, and you'll seize hold of the bundle, and I'll give the carpenter a clout that well mek him think it's the Day of Chidgment.' That's what I was saying; and my foot was on the gangway; but I stopped. Ay, indeed, I stopped. Says I to myself: 'Is it not a good thing to be rid of a lot of weemen's clothes? Does any one want a lot weemen's clothes hanging about one's house?' And back I stepped from the gangway. 'Let them go to Fort William, or to

the duvle, bundle and all ! ' says I—and in a few minutes awch went the *Fusilier*, and I've never set eyes on either of them since. And there's many a man would have made that excuse for tekkin to drink ; but I'm not wan of that kind ; no, no ; I would rather do what little I can to banish ahl that sin and shame from our kintry. Ay, that's jist what it is : drink is the sin and shame of the kintry. Have you a fill of tobacco, Mr. Henderson ? ”

But Allan had left his pouch behind him. So Lauchie with a patient sigh put his pipe in his pocket again, and rose to his feet.

“ I am thinking I will be getting home now. My head is not so well. Mebbe I will try lying down on my bed for a while—there is little hope of meeting in with a friend on a day like this.” So Long Lauchie departed ; and the young schoolmaster was left alone with this great, wide, far-stretching world of moving shapes and vaporous glooms.

Nevertheless there was still some small glimmering of hope. Occasionally there would come a suffused silvery look into a portion of the eastern skies ; the lurid and formless heavens would show symptoms of banking up ; while the slopes of Kerrara, catching this or that wandering gleam, would burn an intense russet-yellow against the blue-black of the Mull mountains. Then again a gradual fading of that wild glare ; a gathering darkness ; an advancing murmur of wind and water ; and forthwith a white smoke of rain would go tearing across the bay, the squall whirling onwards with the hurrying waves. There was not a dog visible along all the deserted sea-front of Duntroone.

However, storm or shine, the people would soon be coming out of the churches now, and so he slowly and watchfully made his way downward from these gusty heights. As the first of the worshippers began to appear, he quickened his pace ; he would have to intercept the two girls—yet in a casual kind of way ; most likely they would make straight for home, instead of attempting any promenade along the wet concrete, that was now all littered with seaweed. And this was precisely what happened. Another minute or two and he would have missed them. He encountered them at the corner of the street. They

had had no thought of going along by the sea-front on such a morning.

"Well, now, Allan," said Jess, with her grey eyes smiling benignly (Barbara paid little heed to him: she seemed more concerned about keeping her waterproof-sleeves well over her wristbands), "this is not a day for any one to be outside. Will you come home with us, and take a little bit of dinner with us?"

"It is very kind of you, Jessie," he was beginning to say with some embarrassment, when she interrupted him.

"But you are going to refuse, as usual. Do you think it is very friendly, Allan? I know that we cannot talk about anything that would interest you, for the President of the Duntroone Literary and Scientific Society is such a great person; but we would make you welcome; and cousins, cousins in the Highlands especially, should not be so ceremonious."

Well, the President of the Duntroone Literary and Scientific Society might or might not have been a great and learned person; but at least he had not the heart to refuse this cunningly-worded invitation; and the next minute he was accompanying the two girls on their homeward way.

"And who knows," continued Jess, in her kindly fashion, "but that the afternoon may clear up a bit, and Barbara and you and I might go for a walk over to Ganavan? Oh, yes, it is just as likely as not to clear up a little!"

And eventually, as it turned out, her cheerful optimism was rewarded; for by three o'clock the state of affairs looked sufficiently promising to induce them to leave the house; and deep was the joy in Allan's heart when they had actually set forth upon this excursion. They took an inland route to begin with, but it mattered little to him whither they went. Perhaps it was merely chance that placed him by Barbara's side as they started off; at any rate, he found himself once more subject to the overmastering spell of her mere presence—the inexplicable, extraordinary entrancement of being near her—the wonder and delight of being able to regard the wind stirring the wisps and tangles of her raven-black hair. And indeed that was about all of her companionship that she vouchsafed to him. She rarely spoke, except to answer a question: it

was Jess who did all the talking, teasing him and mocking him, and yet becoming sympathetic enough when she happened to touch upon anything really affecting himself or his future.

They left the highway—they followed a farm road—crossed some heights and knolls—and came in sight of the western seas again. A sombre day, perhaps, for a country walk; and yet there was plenty of colour in the wintry landscape—the yellow of the pastures, the dank crimson of the withered bracken, the intense green of the whins, the blood-red of the bramble-stems trailing across the swollen brook. And when, as they were descending from the heights towards the shore, a sudden fire broke through the heavy clouds lying over the mountains in Mull, why, all the world around them grew radiant, and even the leafless ash-trees caught something of the welcome light, a shimmering touch of silver on the branches that stretched away up into the leaden-hued sky. A most comforting gleam; it was full of promise; it seemed to speak of a general breaking up of those louring heavens: perhaps, by the time they were returning home they might have for company the crescent moon.

At the foot of the hill the burn runs at right angles, and as they were crossing the rude little bridge Allan happened to espy, under the straggling blood-red stems of the brambles, a small white star.

“Why,” he said, “there is the first wild-flower I have seen this year!”

He stepped down the slippery bank, reached under the bushes, and brought away the tiny prize. It was only a daisy—not ‘crimson tipped’ at all—but pale and colourless; none the less the first timid harbinger of the spring was surely an interesting thing, with its mystic message of wonder and hope. Then it was in its way a rarity; he was bound to present it to one of his companions. To which of them? Jess rather stood aside a little, looking askance.

“Would you care to have it?” said he to Barbara, and he shyly offered her this humble little token.

Yes, she took it; and she thanked him in a kind of fashion—that is to say, with her voice, not with any glance of her unfathomable eyes; then they went on again. And

Jess had not lingered behind to wipe away any sudden tears of mortification and reproach ; for she was a sensible lass ; and she had but the smallest sense of her own importance and value in the world. Only, for a little time, she was silent and preoccupied.

They went down to the shore, and the sands, and the rocks, round which the dark green sea was monotonously washing, with crisp white flashes of foam here and there. A lonely place ; as the calling of the startled birds bore witness—curlews, oyster-catchers, sandpipers, and the like ; while everywhere there was dispersal—the black and white gleam of a pair of arrow-flighted mergansers, the slow-flapping laboured progress of a heron, the cautious retreat of a deep-swimming skart that was already a mile out from shore, dipping its head from time to time, and paddling still further away. But in a very few minutes silence prevailed again ; several of the flocks of birds returned to their feeding-grounds ; and when the three strangers, having sought out a convenient seat for themselves on the rocks, took their places, there was no further cry or sign of protest against the intrusion.

And of what did these young folk talk, in the gathering twilight ? Allan Henderson hardly knew. The folds of her dress were visible to him, that was enough ; the magnetic, alarming consciousness that she was almost within touch of him ; the secret wistful hope that sooner or later she might turn towards him more friendly, more interested, eyes. It was Jess who rather came to the rescue ; and so also on their way back to the town ; she had heard of the great German mediæval poem that Allan was endeavouring to translate ; and she wanted to know how he was getting on with the laborious task ; and sought to reassure him about his doubts as to whether he should be able to find a publisher. For she was a kindly, helpful sort of creature ; and she had a resolute faith in the future of this young man.

The last of the twilight was vanishing as he parted from them at the house in Campbell-street. And it was with a heavy heart, it was with a bitter sense of disappointment and despondency that he turned away and set out for home. For too surely he had observed that the first little tentative

token of friendship he had offered to Barbara Maclean she no longer carried in her hand. Doubtless she had tossed the worthless thing aside into the highway, to be trampled in the mud ; or perhaps she had idly dropped it into one of the brackish pools—half rain, half sea-water—out on the dark rocks where they had been sitting during an enchanted but hopeless hour.

CHAPTER X.

THE SUN-GOD.

THEN the great evening drew near on which the McAskills of the Argyll Arms were to entertain the members of the Gaelic Choir and other friends ; and Peter McFadyen had been as good as his word, he had procured an invitation for Barbara. At first Jess was doubtful as to whether it would be quite fitting for their family, in view of recent events, to be present at any such festivity ; but she found that Barbara was not at all sensitive on the point ; and the compromise finally suggested by Mrs. Maclean was to the effect that the two girls should go to the *soirée* and concert, but should either come away, or remain for a little while as mere spectators, when the dancing began. And Jessie was indefatigably kind in looking after Barbara's costume, and lending her some small trifles in the way of feminine finery.

"Every one will look at Barbara," said she, laughing, to her mother, "and no one will look at me ; so it's but right she should have the choosing of anything I have."

And again Mr. McFadyen was as good as his word : on the momentous evening in question, and for mere extravagance and display, he brought a 'machine' to take the two girls round to the Volunteer Drill-Hall ; and Barbara, stepping across the pavement, found herself ushered into a vehicle the like of which she had never entered before—a vehicle with luxuriously-cushioned seats, and windows that could be shut up against the rain, and lamps that sent out a soft glow out into the black night. Mr. McFadyen, fussy, eager, proud of the charge that had been bestowed on

him—for Mrs. Maclean had begged to be allowed to remain at home—was in the highest of spirits ; and there were more triumphs, more feats of prowess, to announce : Gilmour had again been beaten on the links that very afternoon.

“It’s the Pinnacle,” cried Peter, chuckling and grinning, and he rubbed his hands in delight. “It’s the Pinnacle that bashes Gilmour every time ! And the angry man he is !—smashing at the ball with the lofting-iron, and then grinding his teeth as he watches it come trinkle, trinkle down the hill again, right back to his feet ! Dod, that Pinnacle ’ll be the death o’ the station-master, as sure’s I’m living.”

The way up to the Drill-Hall was along an obscure back-lane ; and in the prevailing darkness the ‘machine’ moved cautiously ; but at length it stopped at the foot of some steps in front of a large, oblong building, and Mr. McFadyen descended to hand out his companions. And what was this sound that came from the interior of the hall?—this was no feeble trembling of a Jew’s-harp—this was the shrill and warlike scream of the pipes—it was the ‘Athole Gathering’ that was being played to welcome the now-arriving guests. The proud McFadyen, when they got up to the door, would fain have entered with one of his charges on each arm ; but clearly there was no room for this ostentatious parade ; and so, as Jessie hung back a little, in her usual fashion, it was Barbara whom he found himself escorting in—Barbara, whose great, beautiful eyes looked with dumb wonder and astonishment on this gay spectacle—at the brilliant illuminations, the walls and ceiling hung with flags of resplendent colour, the long tables sumptuously set forth and decorated. She was bewildered, but not frightened. She shook hands with her host and hostess without perturbation. And then the three new-comers moved on to an open space from which they could the better observe the subsequent arrivals.

“So you say Allan Henderson is not to be here to-night,” Mr. McFadyen remarked to Jess. “Why that ? Maybe he thinks his clothes are not quite smart enough for such a fine gathering.”

Jess flushed quickly—perhaps angrily, despite the habitual gentleness of her nature.

"He has no need to think of any such thing," said she. "He would look well wherever he went, and in whatever clothes. It's not clothes that give a man a distinguished appearance."

There was more than a touch of indignation in her tone. And then she went on again, proudly—

"Perhaps there may be something of more importance for him to be thinking about than a concert and a dance in a drill-hall. Do you know this, Mr. McFadyen—that he is preparing a lecture on the Folk-Songs of Germany, and he is translating the lesser-known amongst them himself? Any one else would take the Folk-Songs that have already been translated and be content with them; but that is not Allan's way; he is too thorough, too much in earnest for that; and suppose, now, when the lecture has been delivered to the Society, it was afterwards to be put into shape and sent to one of the great magazines in London—and perhaps with his name too—that would be something for one to speak of, and him only a schoolmaster in Duntroone."

"You seem to be very familiar with Allan's plans," said the town-councillor, rather spitefully.

"Then it is not from any boasting on his part," Jess retorted, with a fine courage. "It is not boasting that he is given to. And some day we may not be wondering quite so much that he found something more important to do than come to a merry-making of this kind."

"Ay, well, well," said Peter. "Allan is a good lad. There's many a worse lad than Allan, whether he has a small salary or a big one. And I'll buy the magazine, yes, that I will. I would not be surprised if I bought six copies of it, and gave them about. He's a good enough lad is Allan." For he would not have had this unfortunate little disagreement continued on so auspicious an occasion; especially as every moment new friends were arriving, and he was eager to show that he had been entrusted with this guardianship. Which of the younger men would have been so favoured?

Meanwhile Barbara had not overheard a single word, so wholly engrossed was she with the kaleidoseopic and many-coloured scene before her. But amongst all the guests who were now assembled there was one whom her eyes followed

with a curiosity that at length became a species of fascination. He was a young man of about five-and-twenty, fair-complexioned, with close-cropped curly or rather wavy hair of a light golden-brown. He seemed to be acquainted with every one; as he went about he was laughing and talking to this one and that; he had a happy, good-natured, confident air; he was much at his ease; his manner seemed to say that he was pretty sure of his welcome wherever he went. Then what rendered him not less conspicuous was that among all the men in the room he alone wore evening dress. Barbara had never seen evening dress before—except, perhaps, as pictured in some stray copy of a penny illustrated paper; but now here, amid these brilliant lights, in this fine company, it appeared to her altogether beautiful. Beautiful was the fine, smooth, black cloth that seemed to show off the young man's figure so elegantly; beautiful the shining shirt-front, with its neat little single stud of gold; necktie and collar and cuffs—all were perfection, and all were worn with such freedom and grace. In dress, in manner, in appearance, he was so wholly different from the others. Could he be the son of some great laird, she asked herself, with a kind of awe. And intently her eyes followed him, as he moved hither and thither, shaking hands with this one, nodding to that—a radiant being—an apparition: had the time come back for the gods to descend and appear among men?

And then Barbara found herself all trembling—and wishing to be away—and yet powerless to escape. He was clearly coming to this corner; and quickly too; he had a card in his hand.

“How are you, Mr. McFadyen?—I've got you at last,” said he, and his voice had a cheerful ring. Then he seemed to recognise the fact that the town-councillor had companions. “Oh, how do you do, Miss Maclean!—I hope you are going to give me a dance to-night——”

“This is my cousin Barbara, Mr. Ogilvie,” said Jess.

He turned towards her with the briefest glance, and bowed. The poor lass—overcome by the splendour of his presence—her eyes abashed and fixed on the ground—made some bungling little effort at a curtsy. It was all she knew; she could do no better; and probably she was hardly aware

of what she did. And most likely he did not notice ; for he had turned again to McFadyen.

"We've put you down for a toast, Mr. McFadyen," said the young Master of Ceremonies. "You have to propose the ladies——"

"No, no—na, na," said Peter, in sudden fright. "No speech-making from me——"

"But why not?—why not?" remonstrated the young man. "You can make fine speeches about water-rates and gas-lamps—I read the reports in the paper every week ; and you're the ladies' man—you're the very one for this toast——"

The councillor had been disconcerted only for a moment. He was not going to play craven, with Jess looking on.

"Well, I'll not deny," said he, pulling himself up a bit, "that I can say a few words at a fitting time. I'm not an orator, perhaps——"

"You'll do just splendid," said the light-hearted M.C., hurrying away to get his other business finished—and leaving poor Barbara with an overwhelming conviction that she had been guilty of a stupidity and awkwardness too dreadful to be recalled or even thought of.

And a very merry, happy, excited, loquacious assemblage this was that eventually got itself seated at the long tables ; and right gallantly did the town-councillor proceed to look after and entertain his two companions. It is true that at times a thought of his appointed speech would suddenly penetrate him ; he would collapse and sink into himself—no doubt desperately hunting in the dark spaces of his mind for *impromptus* ; but then again he would rouse himself and shake off these vain anxieties, and would strive to convince his neighbours that for wit, and sarcasm, and apposite raillery there was not one of the younger men in Duntroone to come anywhere near him. And Jess was willing to be pleased ; it was an animated, inspiring scene—what with the radiant lights, the festooned flags, the decorated tables ; while for variety's sake the general hubbub of conversation would be broken in upon at intervals by the wild skirl of the pipes—the three tartaned heroes marching round the hall playing 'The Hills of Glenorchy,' or 'Hoop her and Gird her,' or 'Mrs. Ronald

Graham's Welcome Home.' As for Barbara, she sate as one isolated and estranged. Her eyes followed the sun-god—covertly and intently regarding every smile and glance and gesture. And she had ample opportunity for this secret observation; for the young Master of Ceremonies seemed to be looking after everybody but himself; he went from table to table, joking and laughing, and keeping things moving generally. And Barbara's heart sank within her when she saw that those women he spoke to—maids and matrons alike—were all so splendidly dressed, and had such fine adornments about their sleeves, and their necks, and the doing-up of their hair. She became conscious that her cousin Jess and herself were the two most simply-attired young people in the room—a simplicity that appeared to her a distressing plainness. Had the sun-god taken notice? At least he had not stayed talking to them, as he now stayed talking to those others.

"Jessie," said Barbara, at length—and her eyes were cast down, and she spoke in tremulous hesitation, "who was the—the young gentleman—that came up to you?"

Jess had forgotten.

"Which one? When?" she asked.

"Before we sate down," continued Barbara. And she ventured to raise her eyes a little. "He is standing over there by the door."

Jess glanced in the direction indicated.

"Oh, that's Johnnie Ogilvie," said she, blithely. "He's the Purser of the *Aros Castle*."

Barbara was silent for a second or two, gazing furtively the while.

"Does he live in Duntroone?"

"Well, he'll very soon be living in Duntroone, for they put the *Aros Castle* on again at the beginning of next month. And I suppose that is why he has come through here to-night—though he is a great friend of the McAskills whatever." Then Jess laughed. "But you must not be casting your eyes that way, Barbara. He's a fearful lad is Johnnie Ogilvie, for breaking young girls' hearts. At least so they say. I do not believe the lad is any worse than others."

Here silence was called for by a tumultuous hammering

on the tables that made the crystal jump, for Mr. McAskill had risen to say a word of welcome to his guests and to ask them to drink a glass with him. And this was the beginning of the speech-making; but in truth there was not much of it; for there were many things to be got through. It ought to be recorded, however, that Mr. McFadyen acquitted himself well; he was jocose within due moderation; he paid a manly tribute to the charms of youth and beauty; and he earned great applause by saying he would not detain his audience, because they were all looking forward to seeing those bewitching creatures who now sate expectant by their side—those divine creatures who were the sweeteners of man's destiny here below—they were all looking forward to beholding those angelic forms to still better advantage in the mazy intricacies of the dance.

Then the members of the Gaelic Choir withdrew and re-assembled on the platform; the remaining visitors also rising from the tables, to allow the attendants to clear the hall. And soon this large, hollow-sounding place was filled with music less ear-splitting than that of the pipes; the sonorous, softened part-singing of the trained choir was an admirable feature of the evening's entertainment; the guests could not have thanked their host in happier fashion. It may be admitted that the majority of these concerted pieces were of a mournful cast; one of them, in especial—'The Braes of Glen-Braon'—in its heart-breaking wail seemed to give expression to all the sadness and loneliness of the remote and sea-swept isles; but those present were familiar with the prevailing character of Highland minstrelsy; they were not too much cast down by those successive 'Farewells' against which Mr. McFadyen had energetically protested. 'Farewell, Farewell to Fuinary!' sang those harmoniously-modulated voices; then came the 'Lament of MacCrimmon'—with one woman's voice ringing clear and high above the low-rumbling refrain, as if it were some wild note heard from the surge of tumultuous waves; they repeated the plaint of the distant lover—

*'O could I be, love, in form of sea-gull,
That sails so freely beyond the sea,
I'd visit Islay, for there abiding
Is that sweet kind one I pine to see'*

—with many another favourite. Meanwhile the great hall had been prepared for the dancing ; and the pipers were awaiting the word.

“*Suas a’ phìob !*” called out the impatient McAskill.

And presently, after a discordant tuning-up of the drones, the pipes broke clear away into ‘The Marchioness of Tweeddale’s Delight’ ; and that was the signal for the Choir to come hurrying down from the platform, to secure partners, or to be chosen as partners, for the Grand March was about to take place. Then Mr. McAskill and his sister-in-law led the way ; the other couples fell in ; the pipers blew their bravest ; and down the long hall went the joyous procession, every one elated with thoughts of the gaiety that was about to follow. There had been enough of speech-making and of singing of Farewells ; in due course the reel-stage would be arrived at ; and the pipers would have encouragement to put fire and glow into the proceedings, if an occasional dram would help.

Now of all the people here gathered together, only three remained apart.

“Really, Mr. McFadyen,” said Jess, “I am quite ashamed to be keeping you away from the dancing, and you so fond of it——”

“Not at all—not at all !” protested the gallant Peter. “I undertook a charge, and I must fulfil it. And gladly too. I’m just quite proud and pleased to stay here with you. They’ll be plenty of capering later on : five o’clock will not see the last of them out o’ this place.”

“But if we went away now, it would leave you free,” said Jess ; and then again, observing that Barbara’s attention was so completely absorbed by the pageant taking place before her that it seemed merciless to tear her away, she added : “Well, maybe Barbara would like to stay just a little while yet.”

This, at all events, Barbara heard. She turned her great, mystic, appealing eyes to her companions, and said—

“Oh, yes—yes, I would ! A little while more, Jessie !”

For it was not only the pageant ; better now than before her rapt observation could dwell on the young Master of the Ceremonies, who seemed to combine in himself all the elegancies and graces of youthful manhood—elegancies and

graces of a kind she had never hitherto dreamed of. Even his patent-leather boots—the wonderful polish—the pointed and symmetrical shape—the lightness they seemed to lend to his step : this also was another marvel, an allurements, a mystery of fascination. And when the Grand March was over and the pipes had ceased, when the band had come on to the platform, and a quadrille was being formed, it appeared to her as though he were the moving spirit in all this brilliant throng : no wonder those finely-dressed dames, and the younger women with their hair done up in fashionable ways, regarded him with favouring looks and answered him with smiling words.

But Jack Ogilvie, Purser of the *Aros Castle*, would have been a very poor Master of Ceremonies had he allowed those three to remain neglected : he swooped down upon them, with urgent remonstrances, until Mr. McFadyen got a chance of interposing an explanation as to why they were taking no part in the programme. Then the young man went away again, for it was a busy night with him. To Barbara it was as if she had been in a 'dwaum'—a dim, half-conscious swoon—while he was so near her, while the sound of his voice was in her ears.

At length, however, the prudent Jess thought it was time for them to depart ; Barbara mutely yielded—with some lingering, backward glances ; Peter McFadyen had the 'machine' in waiting ; and the girls were driven home under his escort. He left them at the open door—for he was returning to the Drill-Hall, where there might yet be a chance for him to shine in the Varsoviana or the Gnaracha ; and they entered the house to find the blithe little widow awaiting them, with the inevitable tea-pot on the hob.

"And who, think you," said Mrs. Maclean, as the girls were taking off their things, "who, think you, was here all the evening ? Who but Allan Henderson ! Isn't he the sober, quiet lad to think of coming to talk to an old woman, when you young folks were away gallivanting by yourselves ? Poor Allan," she continued, as she put the tea-cups on the table, "I'm afraid he's not very happy and settled at present. He was wondering whether he should not try another country, where there might be a better

opening for him. But we cannot allow that—we cannot allow that at all ! For Allan to leave Duntroone would be just a public calumny——”

“Is it a public calamity you mean, mother ?” Jess interposed.

“Ay, that’s what I said,” the widow went on, in her complacent fashion. “And I was telling him, instead of going to another country, he should just start a small boarding-house in Duntroone, so that some of the farmers at a distance could send in their children that they wanted to have regularly at school. Only, Allan would need to have a wife to manage for him ; and there’s more than one lass would be willing, that I’m sure of ; for he’s a good lad is Allan ; and you’re always saying yourself, Jessie, that he’s astonishing clever, and will do great things yet. Well well, I hope the struggle will not bear too hard on him.”

Barbara Maclean took no part in this discussion. She was standing in front of the fire, staring into it. It was not of the schoolmaster, and of the poor outlook of his life, that she was thinking—there were more luminous, fascinating, wonderful pictures burning in her brain.

CHAPTER XI.

“THE WILD TEARS FALL.”

BARBARA MACLEAN’S household duties were light ; practically she had the mid-day to herself ; and she had got into a habit of stealing out and wandering along to the triple windows of the chief draper’s shop in the town, where she would stand gazing with entranced and covetous eyes. This was indeed different from the “merchant’s” store at Kilree ; here were beautiful kid gloves with furred wrists and many buttons, silk kerchiefs of every hue, ribbons and laces, boas, muffs, tartan scarves, elegant black hats with surmounting black feathers, and a hundred things each more wonderful than the other. And occasionally a

waggonette would drive up, bringing in some family of gentlefolk from the neighbouring country ; and as mother and daughters descended, and crossed the pavement, Barbara would watch them with an eager and furtive scrutiny, marking every detail of their deportment and dress. And then she would return to the study of this resplendent finery—which was all so far away from her ; for although her aunt had insisted on her accepting a small salary, it was merely to save the girl's sense of independence, and did not bring these fascinating things any nearer her.

Now by some means or other Allan the schoolmaster had become aware of this trait in Barbara's character, and it greatly interested and pleased him. A man is tolerant and lenient where a woman has thrown the magic glamour of her eyes over him ; this peculiarity, the young schoolmaster said to himself, only proved her to be a daughter of Eve ; she was human, she was one of ourselves ; she was no impossible and visionary maiden come out of the night and the sea. And on a certain afternoon he went along to Jess, whom he found at the counter.

"Jessie," said he, with even more than his usual diffidence, "if your mother is in, could you come with me for a few minutes to McLennan's the draper's ?"

"Oh, yes, indeed !" said the ever-good-natured Jess ; but she looked up wondering : what concern could the grave and studious Allan have with a haberdasher's shop ?

"I want you to help me to choose a little present—something a young girl would like—something pretty and smart that she could wear——"

Jessie's face flushed quickly ; and she seemed to draw back in confusion.

"But why should you think of such things, Allan ?" she said, in a tone of remonstrance. "Why should you wish to give finery to anyone ? I know your own tastes are all very simple ; and it is not right for you to be spending money in this way——"

"But, Jessie," he answered her, though still with a certain shyness, "I am anxious that Barbara should feel she was amongst people who wish her well. She is a young girl—and still partly a stranger—and I was thinking if I could get something that would please her—a little present

of that kind would at least show a friendly intention—and she would understand it.”

He did not notice the swift change of expression—of alarm, almost—that had passed over Jess Maclean’s face the instant he had mentioned Barbara’s name.

“Oh, yes,” she said, in eager haste. “You are quite right, Allan. I am sure it would please Barbara. And as you say, she may be feeling a little strange yet in Duntroone. Oh, yes, for Barbara. It’s quite different with Barbara. And will you be going now? For I will get ready at once.” And with that she disappeared into the back-parlour, to fetch her things.

He never knew what keen arrow he had driven through her heart. For she was a brave kind of a lass and naturally cheerful; and by the time these two were walking along the pavement, on their way to the draper’s, she was making merry over the idea of the austere and absent-minded student going to buy millinery, and was teasing him, and mocking him with her mischievous eyes. But she was very friendly all the same; and in the shop her counsel was sage and prudent—for she knew that, though his means were scant and his own habits as regarded himself sparing enough, there was Highland blood in his veins, and there was no saying but that he might do something reckless. Eventually they decided upon a *fichu* of black silk, trimmed with black lace, and adorned with black glass bugles. It was Jess Maclean’s inward surmise that the bugles would prove attractive to Barbara.

Then arose the question of presentation; and here again Jess unselfishly came to his aid; she could see that he was awkward and unskilled in such affairs, and perhaps also a little apprehensive.

“Why not come along in the evening?” said she, “and smoke a pipe as usual; and I will send over to the house for Barbara; and you can give her your present without any great formality. Sure I am she will be very proud of it.”

“That’s what I will do, then, Jessie,” said he. “And I am very much obliged to you.” And then, having seen her as far as the door of the shop, he turned and made his way home to his books—or to such wild fancies and hopes and

fears as would obstinately thrust themselves between him and the printed page.

But he need not have been at all apprehensive as to the manner in which Barbara would receive his present. When, later on, he was in the little parlour, and when, in answer to a message, Barbara came over from the house, any one could have seen that she knew what was going to happen : there was a tinge of pretty embarrassment in her face, and she shook hands with him in a shy kind of way, and for a second—O wonder of wonders !—the beautiful dark-blue eyes, from under their jet-black lashes, glanced at the young man with quite unusual and modest friendliness. He was bewildered—his heart went beating—so that he could scarce explain to her his reasons for begging her to accept this simple gift ; but Jess proceeded to open the small packet ; and Mrs. Maclean was loud in praises of the *fichu* ; while Barbara's mystic and unfathomable eyes were filled with pleasure when she beheld the silk and the lace and the glittering beads. Then she turned to the young man. She hesitated. And it was in Gaelic that she had to speak her thanks to him, the English not coming freely enough or not being expressive enough ; and for another ineffable moment her glance dwelt upon him with the kindest regard. And if he was bewildered before, he was bereft of his senses now. He had it in mind to sell his books and all his belongings and lay out every farthing in McLennan's shop. But at this point the town-councillor made his appearance, and something like sanity was restored.

Peter McFadyen, as it turned out, was an angry man. Nay, did not some tone of complaint and reproach run through his tale of injury—seeing that Lauchie the shoemaker was an especial friend of Mrs. Maclean's ?

"I just went into the Argyll Arms"—such was his indignant story—"to say to Mrs. McAskill what everybody has been saying ever since the dance, that it was one of the greatest successes ever known in Duntroone ; and I was not inside but a few minutes ; and when I came out, here was this man Lauchlan MacIntyre—your friend Lauchlan, Mrs. Maclean—and he was waiting for me round the corner. Confound his impudence ! 'Oh, Mr. McFadyen,' says he, 'I'm sorry to see ye gang that gate. You've been into the

very ante-room of hell. And you a man of posection, that should be an example to all of us! But there is time—there is time for you to hold back—you may escape destruction yet. There's a meeting of the Rechabites to-morrow night, and if ye'd come with me, ye might be persuaded to join us. Drink is a terrible thing, but it can be mastered——”

Mr. McFadyen suddenly broke off.

“Ay, do ye think it is a laughing matter, Miss Jessie?” he demanded—for Jess had been quietly giggling to herself. “That impudent drunken scoundrel!—and me, a town-councillor—and one o’ the most temperate men in Duntroone. Find me a more temperate man than I am, in the whole of Duntroone—and I’ll eat him!”

“Poor Lauchie!” said the little widow, with easy compassion. “Sometimes I think he is going to keep on the straight road; and maybe he is that way now; but I am never very sanguinary——”

“Sanguine, you mean, mother!”

“Ay, just that. You can never be sure about Lauchie. And it’s a bad sign when he takes to the preaching. It’s a sign he is likely to break out again. But he’s not a bad kind of man, Lauchie: there’s many a worse man than Lauchie.”

Now the town-councillor, when he had made his protest, and asserted his dignity, had no mind to let Jess Maclean think that he was one to bear ill-will; he dismissed the subject of Long Lauchie altogether; and very soon he was giving his audience, with many chucklings of satisfaction, a description of how he had that very afternoon triumphed over all his opponents at throwing the hammer in his backyard. Nevertheless he did not wholly monopolise the conversation; and the chubby and chirrupy little man was sharp-sighted enough; it was not long ere he perceived that now, when the schoolmaster addressed Barbara Maclean, she turned to him with a kindly and friendly attention she had never hitherto paid him. And did not Jess notice? Ay, and Mrs. Maclean? As for Peter, he was delighted. If this was the way things were going, so much the better for his own daring schemes.

“Dod, man, Allan,” said he, as these two were walking

home, through a somewhat wet and blustering night, "ye're on the track at last. Ye've made your mark. You'll have her. She's yours—if you've the courage to go in and win. I can see it. I'm not blind. The lass is well-disposed towards ye. But ye'll have to speak—ye'll have to speak, man !——"

"I understand what ye mean, Mr. McFadyen," said Henderson, in his grave and deliberate fashion. "But these are hardly matters to be guessed at in so light a way. One must not hope for too much, merely on account of a little friendliness. And even if what you say were possible, there are many perplexities around me and ahead of me. It's all very well for you that have a fine position, an assured position, to talk in the heroic strain ; but I have to consider that I might be dragging into misery, and uncertainty, and wretchedness, one that's of far more importance than myself——"

"No, no, man !" returned the sprightly councillor. "Ye take far too serious a view of life. Young folk must have courage and run risks. And if you don't, why, in the case of a handsome lass like that, somebody else will be coming along and snapping her up. Here, Allan, lad," he said, halting—for they had just arrived at his dwelling-house, which adjoined his office. "Ye'll just come in and sit down for a few minutes, for I've something to say to ye that may be of importance to ye by-and-bye."

The young man did not refuse. He had no great love for McFadyen—in fact he was rather inclined to treat him with impatience and disdain ; but there were momentous issues at stake ; and perhaps some talk with this older man, who had seen more of the world, might make matters a little clearer. So he waited until Peter fumbled in his pockets for his latch-key—both of them no doubt looking forward to a quiet and confidential chat, perhaps with some little solace of tobacco.

There was to be no such thing, at this time and place. McFadyen put the key in the lock, turned it, and was about to enter, when immediately behind the door there was a low and savage growl. He sprang back incontinently, dragging the door to with him.

"Lord's sake alive !" he exclaimed, when he had partly recovered himself. "It's that dog !"

“What dog?”

“The bull-dog I bought from Jamie Nicholson yesterday; and it was to be sent home this afternoon; and that idiot of a servant-lass seems to have left it free in the house instead of tying it up in the backyard. What’s to be done? It’s a fearfu’ beast. Some rascals have been stealing my coals, and I thought I would pay them out——”

“And the dog is strange to you?”

“I never saw it but three minutes yesterday,” said the distressed councillor, “and it would not know me from Adam, even if the house was not in darkness!”

Here the schoolmaster broke into one of those portentous guffaws that had so perplexed Jess Maclean; he roared and laughed; he better roared and laughed; while the councillor’s temper, amid all his distractions, began to grow warm.

“A man shut out of his house by his own dog!” Allan cried, with another prodigious fit of laughter. “Well, there’s but the one thing for it. Maybe he’ll recognise you as the master of the place. Go boldly by him——”

“Go boldly by him yourself!” retorted the councillor angrily.

“But you cannot stand in the street all night! Where’s the maidservant?”

“She’s in her bed long ago!”

“Well, then, you must go round by the back and get in that way.”

“How can I? What’s the use of talking nonsense?” answered McFadyen, with savage fretfulness. “Do you think I would leave my coal-ree open, when I got this infernal beast for the very purpose o’ protecting it? And the key of the gate’s in the office; there’s no way round by the back at all!”

“Well, then,” said Allan, “you’ll have to try gentleness. Go in a little bit, and try to humour him——”

“Go in a little bit yourself, if you’re so clever!” said the councillor, peevishly.

“What are you going to do? Or will you ask the policeman’s advice?—there’s sure to be a policeman round by the station.”

“I would not allow any policeman to go into that passage

—it's as much as his life would be worth!" Peter rejoined in his despair.

"You'll have to send for the man who sold the dog to you."

"Yes!—very likely!—and him at Taynuilt! He went back to Taynuilt yesterday afternoon."

"Very well," said Allan, more seriously, "I'll tell you what we'll do. You cannot stand in front of this house all night. You'll just come along to my room, and you can have my bed, and I'll get a shake-down, or a chair's good enough for me in any case. For you were kind enough, Mr. McFadyen, to hint that there was something you had to say to me; and if it affects what you and I were talking about, I would rather hear of it before going to sleep. It's an anxious time with me. There is not much hospitality I can offer you; but you are welcome."

"Have you plenty of tobacco, Allan?" the councillor asked, still regarding his own impossible door.

"Yes, I have that," responded the younger man. "It's the one thing I can offer you."

"Well and good, then," said he; but before he turned away to follow his companion, and while he was still contemplating the shut door, he added, bitterly: "You'll see if I haven't that beast chained up to-morrow, if there's a blacksmith in Duntroone can fasten a rivet into a stone wall."

* * * * *

Meanwhile the two girls and Mrs. Maclean had shut the shop, and gone over the way, and partaken of their frugal supper, and were now enjoying a friendly chat along with their needlework and knitting. Barbara was evidently greatly elated over her present, and was more talkative than usual; and Jess, who knew not grudging, was cheerfully responsive. Then the little widow kept throwing out merry and mysterious hints.

"Ay, indeed, Barbara," said she, as she was busy with her needle, "ye may well set yourself up. There may be more in that present than you're dreaming of yet. For Allan Henderson has so far paid but little heed to the young lasses about; and they've rather been inclined to look askant at him, and toss their head, for you know the old

saying : ‘*Crone, will you have the king? I will not, as he won’t have me.*’ And so the king has thrown the handkerchief at last, has he? Well, well! And what will they say now, all them he has passed over? Not a lass in Duntroone good enough for him, but the minute one comes in from the outer isles, the misan—the misanthrope comes out of his cell, and all the world is changed, and there’s a miracle for you! Well, well, indeed!”

And so she went on, and Jess listened in silence. For the girl had long ago given up any secret and wistful hope that Allan might look her way; nay, she had argued and steeled herself into the belief that she ought to set herself resolutely against any such thing, even if it were possible. She had formed other plans for him: she knew something of his ambitions. Duntroone was no place for him. He was to go away; he was to win to the front; he was to conquer London; and when he was become a great man and famous, perhaps he might have a single backward and friendly thought for that cousin Jess who had believed in him and urged him on. And in the meantime, and with pride and with a warm sisterly affection she would watch his career.

Apparently this was a very happy evening. But that same night, in the mid-watches, in the darkness, Jess was lying awake. And at such times the nerves are apt to get unstrung and fall away from their ordinary firmness; self-control is not so easy; and certain dreams that she had been ready enough to sacrifice in her auguries of his great future would come back unbidden. Also some lines she had read in an American magazine, that had seemed to her to have in them a curious suggestion of Celtic remoteness, and solitariness, and longing. Why would the Irish girl’s song so haunt her brain?—

“I try to knead and spin, but my life is low the while;
Oh, I long to be alone, and walk abroad a mile;
Yet when I walk alone, and think of naught at all,
Why from me that’s young should the wild tears fall?”

The cabin door looks down a furze-lighted hill,
And far as Leighlin cross the fields are green and still;
But once I hear a blackbird in Leighlin hedges call,
The foolishness is on me, and the wild tears fall!”

Well, the 'foolishness' was on her ; and she buried her head in the pillow, that was soaked with her tears ; and she made desperate efforts to subdue her sobbing. For Barbara was in the other bed ; and she would not awaken Barbara with this unavailing grief. Barbara, who was no doubt placidly dreaming of drapers' windows and black glass bugles.

CHAPTER XII.

IN SORE STRAITS.

THE apartment into which the schoolmaster ushered his guest bore evidence of a hard and rigid economy, not to say downright penury. There was no fire in the grate ; there was but the one gas jet ; the furniture was scant and bare. There were piles of books, to be sure ; but they were all work-like volumes ; not a gay binding amongst them.

"Now this is what I like to see," said McFadyen, rubbing his hands with satisfaction as he took a seat and looked around. "This is what I like to see. And I know what it means. When I observe a young man that's sober and industrious, and that has got a reasonable salary, when I observe him living pinched and poor, then I know what it means : he's saving up to get married."

"It has not been like that with me, then, Mr. McFadyen," the younger man said, as he produced a small jar of tobacco, the only luxury in the place. "I've had to pay back to my folks at home what they lent me for the classes—and that was the least part of what I owed and owe them. And then I undertook the schooling of my two younger brothers ; but one of them has just got a situation, and the other one will soon be looking about too ; so that I may find myself a little freer——"

"Exactly that !" said the councillor, cheerfully. "Something freer to tackle the great problem—the choosing yourself a mate. It's what we are all bent on, though some may be a little later than others——"

"And it will have to be a little later, if ever, with me," rejoined Allan—who was in an unusually confidential mood; he did not often deign to speak of his private affairs. "In my position how could I ask any young girl to take such a risk?"

"God bless my soul!" cried the other, "did ye never hear of such a thing as life-insurance?"

"That is some safeguard for the future, no doubt. But the question is as to the meantime. And if I were to ask any girl to look my way, I should have to tell her my present prospects; and what inducement could I lay before her——?"

"Tuts, tuts, tuts, man!" broke in the happy and hopeful Peter. "That's no the way to talk! Do ye think a young lass is to be won over by a parade of gilded furniture? It's not that she has in her mind when her fancy settles on a lad. Na, na. It's not that will tempt her to kilt up her coats o' green satin, like Leezie Lindsay, and be off with him through bush and briar. It's love well won, and the world well lost—that's more like the ticket, man! Prospects? Life-insurance? Is that what you think she has in her mind? Is that what she answers when he asks her the great question? Not a bit. This is more like what her answer 'll be—" And here the councillor raised his hand triumphantly, and sang in a brave fashion, and with many trills—

‘Gang down the burn, Davie, love,
Down the burn, Davie, love,
Gang down the burn, Davie, love,
And I will follow thee!’

Then Peter moderated his enthusiasm.

"Listen to me, Allan. I will not conceal from ye that I sometimes thought ye had other intentions, when ye came so much about the widow's shop. And then again I said to myself, No, it was only that you were related to the family, and maybe you had not too many friends in the town, and it was but natural ye should foregather with your own kith and kin. And yet again I would say to myself, Yes, there's danger: he's a young man, he has eyes, he cannot fail to see what a fine creature Jessie Maclean is—so good-

humoured, and clever, and bright-looking—just one in twenty thousand——”

“You may say that, Mr. McFadyen,” observed the young schoolmaster, gravely. “Ay, or one in fifty thousand.”

“But now that I see your thoughts are turned in another direction,” continued the councillor, “it’s a great relief to me ; for, to tell you the truth, I’m not without hopes that I might get Jessie for myself. That would be a fine ploy, wouldn’t it?—the two weddings on the same day ! And I’ll tell ye what I’ll do with ye, Allan, lad, just to ‘mak sikker.’ Mrs. Maclean says your best chance is to get married, and start a boarding-house for scholars sent in from the country. And that would need some little capital—the plenishing and what not. Very well ; I’m not a rich man ; but I have a bit of a nest-egg laid by ; and I wouldna mind lending you £50, or even £100, to help you at the start. And I’m sure if there was an understanding between Jessie and me, she would not grudge it either. She’s a half-cousin of yours ; and you’ve been great friends together ; I’m sure she would not object——”

A quick flush had come over Allan’s forehead.

“I thank ye, I thank ye, Mr. McFadyen,” he said, hastily, and with lowering brows. “But it is not to be thought of.”

And therewith he closed his mouth and would say no further word about these poor affairs of his : so that Peter, who was evidently in a state of buoyant anticipation, was forced to talk about his own share in this great project, and to describe those personal qualifications—physical strength, skill, tact, knowledge of the world, and the like—which, as he contended, were fairly entitled to put the mere question of years aside. And then, becoming still more sanguine, he grew enthusiastic over the delights of courtship, and the enchantments of love’s young dream.

Now although Allan Henderson had somewhat rudely and abruptly repulsed this friendly offer, it was nevertheless a wonderful thing for him to think of that one or two onlookers had actually been considering the possibility of Barbara’s being favourably inclined towards him. All through the uncongenial toil of the next day there ran as it were little flashes of roseate flame ; his eyes would become

blind to those monotonous forms and their occupants ; the grey hours had occasional startling moments when the outside world was revealed to him as in a vivid dream. And when at last it was all over, when he could emerge into the clearer air, instead of returning to his lodging, he struck away on a solitary ramble by sea and shore : there was a lifetime of contingencies to be faced and resolutely examined, so long as that was possible while those quivering, rose-tinted flashes—those fascinating and elusive will-o'-the-wisps—would break in upon his sight and bewilder him.

He left the town by way of the harbour, climbed the Gallows Hill, and proceeded along the edge of the steep cliffs overlooking the sea. The rain of the previous night and morning had long ago ceased ; the clouds were now banked up ; there was a brooding silence ; the click of the oars of a small boat crossing the bay could be distinctly heard, even at this height. And in the prevailing calm of sky and sea and mountain there was something that seemed in a measure to allay the agitation of his mind ; there was peace in those great spaces of the universe ; a quiet that conduced to a serener and saner contemplation. Wild hopes were dazzling and exciting things, no doubt ; but the destruction of them could also be met and endured, by a man.

As it chanced, he had been so profoundly plunged in these meditations that he had followed the coast-line too mechanically, and now he came to the brink of a chasm that struck inland for some little way. He did not think it worth while going round in order to continue his route ; instead he sate down on the verge of this deep cavity, letting his legs dangle over ; and there he gave himself up to still further wrestling with the problems and distractions that beset him. For one thing, if he were to incur these great responsibilities, he would have to give up many cherished ambitions—some snatch of foreign travel—the issue of his version of the *Nibelungenlied*—and the like : towards which he had been hoarding up his savings. But after all, what were such trivial considerations when compared with the very crown and joy of life, supposing that were now to be put within his reach ? He could hardly believe it possible. He had been bewildered out of his calmer judgment by this

sudden friendliness she had shown him during but one evening. Was it not too much to hope for that the one creature in the world whom he longed to have for his life-companion should on her part turn towards him and choose him out from amongst all others? How could such a thing happen? It was incredible. It was too marvellous a coincidence. Yet what of the marriages of the people he saw around him? In what proportion of cases—or in every case—had the man and the woman found each other in this inscrutable, inexplicable way?

And so, with his under lip firmly set, his forehead drawn together, and his eyes distant, he sate and pondered; until at length he appeared to make an effort to throw off this weight of thinking in a determination to arise and get home: it was long past the hour for his chief daily meal. But at this moment, whether it was that his foot had been resting on some loose stone, or that his leg had got benumbed, as he attempted to get up something seemed to give way beneath him, and the next instant he found himself slipping down a few inches. He caught at the nearest object—it was a small rowan bush—to steady himself; but the bush came away in his grasp: nay, this very movement appeared to make his case worse, and he felt himself helplessly going. Then he threw himself back, and thrust out both hands in some desperate endeavour to grip anything that would check his descent; he clutched and clung, but all to no purpose, for the sides of this chasm were almost sheer; and the next thing he knew—or half-knew—was that he was hurtling down into this black hole—then came a dull crash—a sharp agony of pain—then silence—and a strange, not unblissful sinking out of consciousness.

When he came to himself again, stunned and dazed, he slowly and gradually became aware of his position. He was at the bottom of one of those fissures in the conglomerate rock that abound along this coast, and that mostly run down to the sea. This one also trended towards the shore; but there was no escape for him that way; for the mouth of the cavern was barred by an enormous mass of the same rock. However, he was not much alarmed. He would be able to scramble up again, somewhere or other. The sides of the chasm, if they were steep, were not at all bare; there

was a kind of stunted vegetation—bits of rowan bushes, heather, birch, and broom—between him and the strip of daylight ; he would choose his upward path when his head was a little clearer.

Then he essayed to rise ; but to his consternation he found himself incapable of movement, or only of such movement as caused him indescribable torture. The truth flashed in on him. Something was broken. And then for a moment a frantic resolve to get out of this death-trap possessed him—at any cost of agony he must win up to the open again—surely he could drag the broken limb from point to point, until his fingers clasped the edge, and he could raise himself into the blessed freedom of the outer world. And again and again he tried, making superhuman efforts, and again and again he was baffled by overwhelming pain ; until he sank back exhausted and half-despairing on his narrow bed of withered and sodden fern.

Thus he lay for a while spent and done ; but of a sudden something occurred that caused his heart to leap. There was a sound in the road below—the road that skirted the shore ; the footfalls drew nearer ; he could even in a dull kind of way hear voices—apparently the voices of two men. Surely this meant rescue for him. And when he judged that the men were about opposite to him, he called and shouted ; but even as he did so he had a dreadful consciousness that the shouts were muffled—that they did not seem to travel out of this cavern. Nevertheless he continued to call as loudly as he could ; until the footfalls gradually ceased ; and he was left once more with silence, and the gathering over of the twilight.

He began to reason with himself against unnecessary dismay. He was not much more than two miles from the town. Some children would be sure to come wandering along, if not this evening then on the following morning or afternoon. Or a shepherd's dog would discover him, and its barking would fetch its master to his aid. Or surely, when his friends missed him from his usual haunts, they would organise a search-party. So long as he retained some power of calling to any chance passer-by, he would not abandon himself to despair ; whatever might happen, a stout heart could not harm.

Night came early over this deep gap; and the darkness seemed to last for ever and ever. He listened to the moaning of the wind in the bushes overhead, and to the long-protracted hiss of the waves along the shore. Towards morning—he guessed it must be towards morning, after those immeasurable hours—a few small silver points began to glimmer in the black opening above; but the starlight was of little use to him except in so far as it showed the skies were clearing. Further hours, as it seemed to him, passed; and then, with a great rejoicing and reawakening of hope, he perceived that the dawn was really drawing near. Stealthily, imperceptibly, such strip of the heavens as he could see became of a pearly-blue grey. A little while, and that was more opalescent in tone. Again, a touch of saffron appeared—soft, and distant, and luminous: some bit of slowly-moving vapour looking over to the opening east. Finally the new day declared itself, in a splendour of mottled rose-grey clouds—and he thought of the happy folk in Duntroone.

No, he would not give in. Down here in the cold-hued twilight, amid the livid greens and the wet russet of the bracken, there were thin threads of half-melted snow here and there; and some of these he could reach; and very welcome was the chill moisture to his parched lips. Then again, as the morning wore on, there was the distraction of listening to the occasional faint sounds in the road below; but he had abandoned all hope of aid from that quarter; he knew he could not make himself heard. His only chance was in attracting the attention of some one passing along the summit of the cliffs; and so from time to time, at random, he called aloud, and paused to listen. But hour after hour went by, and no one came near. At times he grew faint. There was an odour from some decayed herb—St. John's-wort, most likely—that seemed to stifle him. Now and again it appeared to him that he was becoming light-headed; the strangest fancies crowded into his brain; he was possessed with a wild desire to shout songs—students' songs: *Gaudeamus—Vive la compagnie*—and even dafter ditties than these—*O tempora! O mores!—Per secale obvenisset, Corpus corpori*. He had had no food since the previous morning; his wild efforts to drag himself out of

this abyss—the agony he had endured—had left him hopelessly weak ; and now, with these delirious impulses and imaginations taking possession of him, he could only say to himself, “ If my senses go from me, that will indeed be the end.”

And thus it was that when, some time during the afternoon, he saw a head cautiously protrude itself through the twigs and withered grass at the top of the chasm, he did not believe there was anything or anybody there. That was but another of the fantastic visions that had begun to haunt him. Nevertheless, he called out as hitherto he had been calling out at intervals—though now not so loudly as heretofore, for he was enfeebled and listless—

“ Help ! help ! ”

The head was instantly withdrawn. But at the very moment of its withdrawal something convinced him that it was a real human face that had been cautiously peering down, and that it was the face of Niall Gorach.

“ Niall ! Niall ! ” he cried, with all his remaining strength. “ Come back ! Come back, man ! Or go and fetch somebody ! Tell them ! Tell them I cannot move ! ”

There was no reappearance of that mysterious, peering and prying face ; but he comforted himself with the fancy that the frightened Naill had ran away into the town, and that soon succour would be at hand. He waited, listening intently, minute after minute, half-hour after half-hour, hour after hour ; and there was no sign. And again the night fell, and the dark.

But this blackness around him was no longer like the blackness of the previous night ; it was all filled with light and colour and moving phantasms ; there were sounds of music also, some mournful, some gay. Jess Maclean brought him a pitcher of ice-cold water, and he drank and drank, and thanked her, and he did not know why she was crying. Barbara Maclean hung back a little ; and he tried to speak to her ; but could not. McFadyen came to him with a copy of a great review in his hand ; there was an article in it on the new translation of the *Nibelungenlied* ; it was a friendly writing. Again there were students singing in a room in Glasgow—there was a roaring chorus :

"*The Old Folks at Home*"—then some one sang "*Lieb Vaterland, magst ruhig sein!*"—and this phrase kept repeating itself more and more distantly and softly—*magst ruhig sein—magst ruhig sein*—until the lights grew dim—and the apparitions vanished—and there was silence—and oblivion.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT OF THE DEEPS.

NEXT day about noon Niall Gorach put his head into the little crib of a shop where Long Lauchie was engaged at his cobbling.

"Mr. MacIntyre," said he, in a pleading kind of way, "will ye gie me a piece of leather to make a sooker?"

Lauchie looked up only for a second.

"Away wi' ye, ye idle vagabond!" he said, sullenly. "Better ye would take to some work than come asking for children's playthings. Away wi' ye!"

The half-witted lad had probably expected this rebuff. But he did not go away. On the contrary, with a cautious look round, he advanced a step; and then he said, in a mysterious voice—

"Mr. MacIntyre, if ye'll gie me the piece of leather, I'll show ye the opening into the Bad Place."

"Ay, ye'll find yourself there soon enough!" said the shoemaker, grimly.

"But I'll show it to ye," continued Niall, with his eyes longingly fixed on the scraps of leather lying about the floor. "And they've got Henderson the schoolmaster there: if ye go near enough, ye'll hear him crying out."

"What's that ye say?" exclaimed the now startled Lauchie—for, like all the rest of Duntroone, he had heard of the inexplicable disappearance of the young schoolmaster. "What's that ye say about Henderson—Allan Henderson, do you mean?"

"Ay, just that," said Niall. "They've got him in the Bad Place, and ye'll hear him crying for help, away down

below. And I'll show ye where it is, and there's flames and brimstone, and little devils running about wi' their pitchforks, and the Big Devil, too, and he has fire coming out of his mouth——"

By this time Long Lauchie was on his feet.

"I'm no sure what to believe o' your haverings," he said, and he paused irresolutely, revolving possibilities in his mind. "Do ye mean to tell me that you actually heard Allan Henderson crying out somewhere?"

"Ay, that I did!" answered Niall, eagerly—he saw the 'sooker' coming within reach.

"Where, then?"

"It's a black hole away down past the Gallows Hill. It's the opening into the Bad Place——"

"Come away this minute," said the shoemaker, reaching over for his cap.

"But I'll no go near—I'll no go near!" cried Niall, shrinking back. "There's the Big Devil—and the flames——."

"Ye'll take me to the very spot," said the shoemaker, peremptorily. "And if I find ye've been telling me lies, I'll give ye the finest leatherin' you ever got in your life. And that will be better for you than playing with a sooker."

It was an unlucky threat; for as they set out it was plain that daft Niall followed with the greatest unwillingness: there was a curious, furtive look in his eyes as if he were watching for the first opportunity of escape. But in the meantime Long Lauchlan was a proud man. Had it been reserved for him, then, to discover the missing schoolmaster, while all the others had been searching about and telegraphing in vain? And if that were so, was it not owing to his shrewdness in perceiving that there might be some basis of fact in the murky imaginings of this half-witted gangrel? Lauchie saw himself rising in the esteem of Duntroone, and stepped out boldly.

And then—for they had to go round by the railway-station and the quay to get to the Gallows Hill—his glance happened to light on the red baize door of the refreshment-room. It was a terrible temptation; and instantly all sorts of devil's logic leapt into his brain. Was not this a great occurrence? Ought he not to fortify himself against what-

ever might befall by swallowing a good, stiff dram? It is true that his conscience as a Rechabite said No. But what was this conscience, after all—this unbidden and unwelcome guest? His conscience was only a part of himself; whereas he was the whole; and surely the whole is greater than any part? Why should he be dictated to by any mere section of himself? Besides, the whisky of that refreshment-room was a most superior whisky. And arduous duties might be demanded of him, if the poor lad Allan had chanced into trouble. And—and—— Then of a sudden he shut his lips firm and hard; he kept his eyes straight before him; and walking stiffly and erect, he got safely past the station.

The next moment, however, he awoke to the fact that his companion had vanished. He looked everywhere around; there was no Niall visible. He could not at all understand this piece of deviltry, until his wandering gaze fell on the bridge they had crossed in coming along—a bridge that here spans a burn, or rather an open ditch; and it occurred to him that perhaps the young rascal had slipped over the parapet, clambered down, and hidden himself in that unsavoury refuge. He hurried back. He searched hither and thither. At length he saw two elfish eyes peering from under the archway.

“Come out o’ that, ye limb o’ Satan!” he called angrily. “Come out o’ that, will ye?”

Instead there was an instant disappearance. And then the baffled and irate shoemaker began to pick up stones from the road; and these he endeavoured to shy into that dusky recess. But it was an awkward angle; most of the missiles struck the bridge; and at last, seeing there was nothing else for it, Long Lauchie had himself to get over, and scramble down, and make for the twilight of the arch. When at last he had dragged Niall out by the scruff of the neck, and had him up into the open air again, he said—

“That’s one leatherin’ I owe ye; and maybe there’ll be six more before the day’s done. Ye imp o’ Satan, wi’ your witch’s tricks! But wait till I get ye home again, I’ll give ye something better than a sooker—ay, ay, I’ll give ye something better than a sooker!”

And thereafter he drove him on in front, the better to

keep an eye on him ; and in this wise they climbed the Gallows Hill, and made their way along the summit of the cliffs.

In time Niall began to move more and more reluctantly ; he was evidently creeping forward with much apprehension.

"Whereabouts now ?" demanded the shoemaker.

The daft laddie pointed vaguely with his finger.

"Well, go on—go on, man ! What are you feared of ?" said the gloomy and impatient Lauchie.

"Maybe they'll come out," said Niall, in a whisper, and his eyes were staring ahead. "They hae grippit the school-master, and maybe they'll come out for us. They can run quick, the small ones, though there's no so much flame about them."

"Get on, man, get on !—and let me see the place where ye heard Henderson crying out," said Lauchie ; and then he added, in a more persuasive tone, "And maybe there'll no be a leatherin' for ye at all. Maybe I'll make ye a fine big sooker, and when ye've got the string into it, and when ye've soaked it, it will be strong enough to lift a paving stone out o' the street. Think o' that, now !"

But Niall was no longer occupied with playthings. His eyes were full of dread—and his brain was full of cunning.

"Stand still," he said, in the same cautious whisper, "stand still where ye are, and ye'll hear Henderson. The black hole is just along there. Stand still and listen." And as the shoemaker thoughtlessly obeyed—with his own eyes thrown forward—Niall seized the opportunity to dart away from him, flying off with remarkable swiftness.

Long Lauchie uttered an imprecation, and started in pursuit. But his cramped calling had left him little of a runner ; wherea's the half-witted creature had the speed of a roe and the agility of a wild-cat. Moreover, he had no intention of making this a race in the open. At a certain point he swerved towards the edge of the cliffs, and suddenly disappeared ; and Lauchie, arriving a few moments later, found that he must have boldly attacked the descent, swinging from one leafless bush to another, until he reached the road below. Lauchie, under his breath, called down more curses, and in a morose mood set out to resume his researches alone. He was not quite sure now but that the imp had befooled him from the beginning.

Nevertheless, to satisfy his own mind, he went forward in the direction that Niall Gorach had indicated, spying everywhere about ; and in a very brief space he came to the edge of the chasm. At first, in inspecting this deep gap, he could make out hardly anything ; but in time, his eyes growing more accustomed, he thought there was some object of unusual blackness lying away down there, at the foot of the narrowing fissure. And the better to examine, he laid himself prone on the heather, just as Niall had done, and pushed his head over the brink : the next moment he was convinced that the huddled black mass down there was human.

“Allan—Allan Henderson—is that you?” he called aloud.

Then he was silent, and awe-stricken. For there was no answer ; and it seemed to him that he was in the presence of death. He stealthily retreated from the edge of the chasm, he regained his feet, he set out for Duntroone—something frightened, no doubt, but still considering rapidly in his own mind what ought now to be done.

He had to go round by the railway-station, and about the first person he met was Mr. Gilmour, who promptly offered to send a couple of his men, with a coil of rope. But Lauchie deemed it advisable to go on and tell his tale at the police-station, and there the sergeant on duty at once ordered two of the officers to get ready a stretcher and coverlet. Finally, Lauchie, after a good deal of tracking from house to house, succeeded in discovering the doctor ; and the doctor, on hearing the story, immediately went home to provide himself with some splints, cotton wool, bandages, and the like, and also a flask of brandy. Thus equipped, the little posse comitatus set out, Long Lauchie being guide. And it ought to be noted that in these hurrys to and fro the shoemaker had to pass the red baize door of the refreshment-room no fewer than four times, yet not once did he succumb. With clenched mouth and immovable head he went resolutely by—human weakness only revealing itself, after each achievement, in a long, sad sigh of resignation.

It turned out that one of the railway-servants had been a sailor ; and when they arrived at the deep cleft in the rock,

he volunteered to descend. And a tedious and difficult business it was to get this limp and insensible body hoisted carefully into the upper air ; but at last the hapless young schoolmaster lay extended on the heather ; and the doctor proceeded to his examination. The faintest moan now and again was the only sign of life lingering in that prostrate form ; there was no movement—not even a twitch of agony as the doctor was passing his hand over this or that limb, to ascertain the whereabouts of any fracture ; his eyes were closed as in profoundest sleep.

And meanwhile there were two other persons who had heard of this discovery and were now hurrying out from Duntroone. The one was a strongly-built elderly man, whose natural freshness of complexion was for the moment overmastered by a look of vague and anxious alarm ; the other, also with apprehension written in every line of her face, was Jess Maclean. They hardly spoke to each other ; their thoughts were too intent on what might be awaiting them ahead. And thus they hastened round by the harbour ; they ascended the Gallows Hill ; they got out on to the bleak and open and undulating moorland. It was a picture of utter desolation : for the afternoon had turned out wild and wet and squally ; the livid green waters of the Sound were dark and driven ; the heather bent in waves before the blasts of wind ; the sea-gulls were calling and screaming in the gusty and lowering skies. But into this picture of loneliness and gloom there came something still more sombre—a small black group of figures who seemed to be carefully carrying some horizontal object. It looked so like a funeral procession that Jess Maclean uttered a piteous little exclamation, and laid a trembling hand on her companion's arm ; but this man with the haggard eyes and the now almost bloodless face, did not pause ; he went forward, perhaps a little more slowly ; and Jess accompanied him, their gaze fixed upon that gradually advancing train.

The doctor had lingered behind, by the side of the chasm, to gather together his surgical appliances, and the station-master had remained with him. None the less, when the men who were bringing along this sad burden arrived at the spot where the new-comers were now standing, they did not wait for orders ; instinctively they came to a halt ; they

guessed that the stranger who was with Jessie Maclean must be the young man's father. And at the first glimpse of the grey and lifeless features, and the hand hanging limp and loose from under the coverlet, a spasm of agony crossed the father's face; he seemed paralysed; he could not step forward, nor did he ask any question; with shaking fingers he reverently removed his hat from his head; and as he did so, he murmured something to himself:

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord. But it will bear hard on the lad's mother."

It was Jess who came to his aid. She advanced timidly; she took the hand that hung so limply there; and the next moment she gave a slight short cry.

"He lives!—Uncle, he lives!—there is hope for us!" And at this moment the doctor came up. "Doctor," she said, with tears swimming in her eyes, "is there a chance for him?—is there hope for us?"

"Indeed yes, indeed yes," the doctor made answer. "Go on, lads, go on; but gently. Indeed yes," he resumed, turning to Jess. "Lying out for two days and nights in this cold and wet weather is bad enough; and the poor lad has been smashed about sadly; but I know Allan—I know him well—he's as hard as nails when he gives himself fair treatment. And we'll see him through this, or I'm mistaken. There's not so much damage done—a simple fracture of the leg and a sprained foot; but there's the extreme exhaustion, of course. Well, we must hope for the best, Miss Maclean."

"Where are you taking him to now, sir?" Allan's father asked.

"To the poor-house hospital," was the answer. "It's not the best that could be desired; but it's the only hospital we've got."

"His mother will be sore grieved to hear that," the older man said. "There's never been one of the family near a poor-house; and this one—this one was just the pride of her life."

"It is mainly a question of attendance," observed the doctor. "If you would prefer that your son should be taken to his own lodgings, maybe I could make some arrangement——"

"Could I be of any use, Doctor?" Jess interposed, diffidently and yet anxiously.

"Would you be willing to help?" he said, at once turning to her.

"Ay, that I would!—that I would!" said she, with an involuntary tremor of the lip.

"Very well—very well," said he; and he stepped on to give the men altered directions.

They were now come to the top of the Gallows Hill, the descent from which had to be managed with the greatest caution. When, at length, they arrived at the foot of the steep incline, the doctor was not surprised to discover that Jessie Maclean was no longer of the company; he thought it but natural she should wish to avoid the publicity of walking through the town with this funeral-like cortège; and assumed that she had gone on ahead to her own home. He was mistaken. She had gone on ahead, it is true, and with great swiftness; but it was to Allan Henderson's lodging. And when at last the doctor and his charge arrived, it was clear how busy and alert and dexterous she had been in the interval. Allan's own room was all smartly tidied up; the gas lit—for the dusk had fallen now; a coal fire burning briskly in the grate; the bed carefully made and folded down. Moreover, she had requisitioned the adjacent room, which chanced to be vacant; and here also the gas was lit; while a wicker-work easy-chair had been brought in, for the convenience of any nurse who might want to sit up, and read, and listen. The doctor, busy as he was, looked round, and nodded approval.

* * * * *

Later on that evening Long Lanchie the shoemaker and an old crony of his, Donald Crane—that is to say, Donald that worked the crane at the quay, his real name being Donald Macdonald—were seated together in a corner of a favourite howff of theirs; and Lauchlan was happy. It was the stupidity of the people of Duntroone that seemed to be amusing him most; he laughed and chuckled to himself; while there were glasses and a pewter measure on the table before him that ought not to have been there.

"Donald," said he, in Gaelic, to the crane-worker—and the crane-worker was a thin little hard man, with a thin

hard red face and steel-blue eyes—"Donald, it is you that have some knowledge in your head. But the other people in Duntroone—well, I will give you my opinion about the other people in Duntroone; and it is this—that they were not at home when the sense was shared. To go seeking away along the shore; when the schoolmaster was not a sailor, nor a fisherman, and when it was known he had not taken a boat anywhere: was not that the work of fools? And for a poor idiot lad to get the better of them—well, I am laughing at that, and no mistake! Donald," he went on, suddenly pretending to be sober, "are you not coming up to Fort William with me to-morrow? You will see something: aw, as sure as death you will see something worth while! For I am going to smash the head of the carpenter. I do not want my wife back; and I will not take her back; but it is the head of the carpenter I am going to smash for him—aw, Dyea, will not that be a pretty sight!" He laughed again and again, softly and quietly, in humorous anticipation; then he made a grasp at the pewter measure, but found it empty. "Donald, my noble hero, we will now have another mutchkin—ay, by the piper of Moses, we will have another mutchkin—and I will drink your health. Donald, it is you that are the son of my heart; and it is you that are coming to Fort William with me; and we will see if there is not a drop of Long John left somewhere about in Lochaber!"

He reached over, and rang the bell; and a servant-lass appeared. Long Lauchie had broken out with a vengeance this time.

CHAPTER XIV.

A VISITOR.

So Jess was installed as nurse; and the 'foolishness' was no longer upon her; she was brisk and active and cheerful—especially cheerful when she saw that the care she bestowed on this intractable patient was being rewarded by a steady convalescence. For the young man had naturally a tough

and wiry physique, if only he had allowed it a little more nourishment and a little less tobacco ; and now there was no tobacco, while there was as much nourishment as was deemed prudent ; and the progress made was in every way satisfactory. But intractable he assuredly was. He fretted over the waste of time ; he fretted over the expense of certain little delicacies which, as a matter of fact, never cost him a farthing, for they were sent along out of the kindly thoughtfulness of Mrs. Maclean ; and he fretted over the rules and regulations that Jess, under the doctor's orders, had to impose. Nay, to tell the truth, he was sometimes not over civil to Jess herself. But she only laughed.

"A grumbling patient is a recovering patient," she would say to the town-councillor, who called frequently.

It was not his grumbling that hurt her and opened old wounds. Oftentimes, when she went in to sit with him for half-an-hour, he would talk of nothing but her cousin Barbara ; and the questions he asked showed clearly enough what was running in his mind, and what was the future towards which he was looking. He had got it into his head that a woman must necessarily know more of the character, and disposition, and views of a woman than a man possibly could ; and when he was not himself talking about Barbara, he would have Jess talk of her ; while Jess, in framing her replies to his questions, naturally could speak no word of Barbara that was not hearty commendation.

"And you say she has courage ?" he proceeded, on one occasion. "You imagine she would not be afraid to face straitened circumstances ?"

"As for that," Jess responded, "she has faced nothing else all her life long !"

"Yes, perhaps," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "but I was thinking if she came to consider the question of marrying. She might very fairly look for some better position—some assurance as to the future : marriage is a big enough risk in any case, without any added uncertainty——"

"She would have to take her chance like other folk," said Jess, a little tartly.

But Jess Maclean went and pondered over these things ;

and when in the evening she took him in his bit of light supper, she said—

“Now, Allan, you must not keep worrying about your circumstances and your future, as I think you do. It is merely that this accident has driven you to consider possibilities that are never likely to happen. You are none so ill off, as it is. Mr. McFadyen has made it all right with the School Board, and they’ve got a substitute, and you are to put aside all anxiety to get about again, until you are perfectly well and strong. Then there’s another thing. You must give up the scheme about the boarding-house. It would never do. It would want a great deal of capital; and there would be a great responsibility; and if, as mother suggests, you thought of taking a wife to manage it for you, well, then, how could you go to a girl and say ‘Will you become my housekeeper? I will marry you, so that you may look after my boarders?’”

As she spoke thus Jessie’s fair and freckled face showed some colour; but she was determined to have her say out; she had more than a casual interest in this young man and his designs.

“Now this is what I would advise you, Allan, if you think it is not too impertinent of me to offer one like you advice on any matter at all. In a town like Duntroone there must be plenty of clever young lads, in the shops and the offices, who have never had any chance of the better kind of schooling, and perhaps some of them half-expecting to have a winter or two at college by-and-bye. Well, now, why not start a Latin class for those lads—from eight till half-past nine in the evening, or from half-past eight till ten? There would be no risk in it; there would be no expense except the rent of a big room, and the gas, and the price of an advertisement in the *Duntroone Times and Telegraph*. They would buy their own grammar-books; and the fees would be all found money to you, once the rent was paid. Now will you consider that, if you must go planning and planning about the future?”

He was immensely grateful. And next morning, when she made her appearance, he said—

“Jessie, you are the wisest creature in the world—and the kindest. I have been lying awake half the night,

considering what the advertisement should be, and wondering where I could get a room, and how long it might be before I could begin——”

“Oh, indeed !” said she. “Well, if it’s going to lead to your lying awake at night, I’m not for intermeddling any more in your schemes—or for taking any interest in your affairs. Why should I ?” she added, saucily.

“Why should you ?” he repeated, with a friendly glance towards her. “Because I don’t deserve it. That’s the way of women.”

And yet it was hard on Jess that she should be deputed to coax and persuade Barbara Maclean into paying him a visit. For a considerable time he had kept this secret desire of his to himself ; perhaps in the hope that Barbara would of her own accord come along to see him ; perhaps through some fear that she might be unfavourably impressed by the poor and mean appearance of his dwelling. But the ideas of an invalid are pertinacious ; they grow in importance through the long hours of thinking ; and at last, with some little diffidence, he revealed to Jess what he was most of all longing for, and timidly asked her whether she thought such a thing was possible.

For a second Jess remained silent. Then she looked at him rather askance.

“Perhaps,” said she, “perhaps you would like Barbara to take my place ?”

He seemed startled by the suggestion—but only for a moment.

“No, no,” said he, “I could not be so ungrateful. There’s no one like you, Jessie ; there’s no one could be so kind, and forgiving, and good-humoured, in the face of all sorts of unreasonableness, and ill-temper, and ill-treatment——”

“Oh, you treat me well enough, if only you would treat yourself a little better,” said Jess, bluntly. “I declare it’s most provoking to see you busying away with your books and papers and pencil, when it’s stories you should be reading if you must read at all. I wish your mother were able to come through to Duntroone, to give you a talking to, for my scolding is no use—you pay no heed. Well, I am going along to the house now, to see if the blanc-mange is ready ; and I will try and get Barbara to come

back with me." And therewith she departed, leaving him to wait and lie and listen, anxiously and half-doubtingly and wonderingly, for the first sound of footsteps on the stairs without.

When Jess had gone along to the house and got ready the carrageen blanc-mange for conveyance to her patient, she turned to Barbara.

"Barbara," she said, "would you not like to go back with me now, and look in on Allan, and talk to him for a little while?"

Barbara hardly raised her eyes from her sewing.

"I am sure that would do no good," said she, unwillingly. "It would be more of an annoyance than anything else. And when he has the doctor, and the landlady, and you all looking after him, surely that is enough."

Jess hesitated. She would rather have avoided confessing that it was at Allan's express entreaty she was making this suggestion. But she saw no other way: Barbara was clearly indisposed to go.

"It would be a friendly thing on your part," she said: "for it is very dull for him lying there day after day, and hardly seeing any one. And—and to tell you the truth, Barbara, he asked me to ask you. Come, now!—if it is only for a few minutes."

With evident reluctance the girl put her sewing aside; she got up and fetched her out-of-door things; and presently the two of them had left the house. But they had not gone over a hundred yards when something happened that effectually aroused Barbara from her apathetic acquiescence. There was a distant whistle, repeated again and again—the echo sounding along the shores of Kerrara: and by-and-by a steamer with flags flying came round the point of the mainland. Jessie's pretty and gentle grey eyes were keen-sighted as well.

"Barbara," said she, "you have been asking me sometimes when Jack Ogilvie was coming back to Dunroon. Well, now, if I am not mistaken, that is the *Aros Castle*—they are going to put her on her station next week, to Tobermory and Strontian on Loch Snart. And no doubt Ogilvie is on board of her at this minute."

Barbara suddenly stood stock still.

"Will he be coming ashore? Will he be coming along through the town?" she demanded, hurriedly.

"Very likely," said Jess. "The young man has plenty of friends."

"Jessie," said the other, quickly, "I have forgotten something: I must go back home for a few minutes. Will you come with me, or will you wait here?"

"I will wait here, then," said Jess—for she was at the window of the stationer's shop, and there were plenty of photographs for her to look at.

Then Barbara hastened away back and got to her room; and the first thing she did was to get out from a drawer the handsome *fichu* that Allan Henderson had given her. She whipped off her cloth jacket; she draped herself in that piece of finery; she put on her jacket again, leaving it partly open in front, so that at least a portion of the silk and the lace and the bugles remained visible. Next she went to the mirror, and rapidly and yet carefully attended to her hair, regarding herself from various angles, and slow to be satisfied. From another drawer she took out a pair of kid gloves—whereas when she first set forth her hands had been bare; she provided herself with a silk parasol that she had borrowed on some occasion or another from Mrs. Maclean; she had a final look into the mirror at the set of her hat and its feather; and when she descended into the street, she was quite a smart young lady in appearance. The *Aros Castle* was now lying alongside the quay.

Jessie's quick eyes immediately perceived the change in her cousin's attire; and she said to herself, 'Now, that is a friendly thing to do: Allan will be pleased to see her wearing his present.' And when at length this beautiful creature entered his room, and went forward in rather a perfunctory way to give him her hand, and then retired to a seat a few yards back, the young schoolmaster was not only bewildered and entranced by the mere fact of her being there—by the occasional glance of those large, mystic, deep blue eyes—he was also overjoyed to see that she wore his gift. He made no doubt it was a piece of kindly thoughtfulness on her part; it was an indication of the amiability and sympathy of her nature; it was a token of goodwill that was worth all the world to him. He was

so grateful to her for coming—so thrilled and enthralled by the sight of her—that he did not take particular heed of her silence, nor yet of the somewhat cold scrutiny with which she regarded the furniture of this meagre apartment.

Indeed he was all too anxious to interest and entertain her ; and for that very reason he found it embarrassingly difficult. Small talk was not in his way. What he really longed to say was : ‘Do you know how wonderful and beautiful you are ? Do you know that your sitting in that chair—even when you are silent—makes a kind of splendour in this poor room !’ But at least he managed to ask her if she had been to the recent practisings of the Gaelic Choir and whether they had sung the *Fear a bhàta*, or *The Brown-haired Maid*, or any other of the songs familiar in the outer isles ; and this led him on to speak of his lecture on the German Volkslieder, which had actually been announced for the 15th of the following month.

“And will you be quite well and going about by that time ?” she asked, turning her great, glorious eyes upon him.

“Oh, yes, and before then, the doctor says,” he made answer.

“I am very glad to hear it,” she said, rather listlessly—But he did not notice that : the sound of her voice was like music in his ear.

“And I hope you will come to the lecture, Miss Barbara,” he went on, presently. “The Committee of the Society have got the loan of the Masonic Hall, that has been all newly decorated—indeed they say now it is the most beautiful hall in all the west country——”

“Oh, then, it is to be a very grand affair ?” she said, with a trifle more of attention.

“Well, not such a gay affair as Mr. McAskill’s dance,” said he, laughing, “that I heard was a great sight for you. But we are to have dignities present. The rank and fashion of Duntroone have been very kind in sending for tickets ; and the Committee are trying to persuade the Provost to take the chair. Then I want the front row of seats, next the platform, kept for my own particular friends ; I should feel more at home that way ; and you and Jessie, if you are so kind as to come, must have seats there—Mr. McFadyen

will look after you—and I shall feel that I am among my own folk——”

“Allan, lad,” said Jess, who was placing a small refection on the little table by the side of the bed, “are you trying to persuade Barbara you are so shy and sensitive before an audience that you need private help and sympathy? Oh, yes, indeed! But I know better. I know. I’ve seen you preside over a meeting, more than once. And I’ve seen a dispute arise—cross-arguments, confusion, words flying; and then I’ve seen the chairman get up, with a face as black as thunder; and weren’t the quarrelsome folk pretty soon quieted down—ordered to the right about, and every one of them feeling he had made a fool of himself! It is not only in the school that the schoolmaster must lay down the law, and hector, and have everything his own way——”

“Jessie!” the young man remonstrated, blushing furiously. “What’s this you’re saying? What will Barbara think?”

“Keep your temper, Allan,” Jess responded, coolly. “If ye lost it, it would be a bad thing for the one that found it.”

At this point Barbara rose, intimating that it was now time for her to go; she advanced to the bedside and bade him good-bye; she said a word or two in passing to Jessie; and with that she left.

“There, you see, you’ve frightened her away with your nonsense!” he exclaimed, fretfully and angrily.

“Better she should go now,” Jess said, in her usual placid way, “before she got tired: she is all the more likely to come again.”

“And do you think she will come again?” he asked, with a sudden alteration in his tone.

“Why not?” answered Jess, good-naturedly. “She is not kept over busy. I dare say she is away back home now to hem handkerchiefs for herself.”

However, Barbara Maclean had not returned home to resume her sewing. When she got outside, she lingered about the pavement, pretending to study the shopwindows, but in reality glancing furtively up and down the thoroughfare, with an occasional look across the bay towards a certain red-funnelled steamer moored at the opposite quay. After

a while, and with an affectation of carelessness as though she hardly knew whither she was going, she proceeded along the esplanade in the direction of the railway-station; and when she reached the railway-station, she went to the bookstall, and seemed to be wholly engrossed in contemplating the periodical literature displayed there. But close to the bookstall there is a large gateway opening on to the road that here skirts the harbour; and along this road anyone coming either to or from the South Quay must necessarily pass, whether he chooses to look into the railway-station or not. And it was at the South Quay that the *Aros Castle* was now lying.

CHAPTER XV.

ENCOUNTERS.

LONG LAUHLAN the shoemaker did not at once put into execution his threat of going to Fort William to smash the head of the carpenter; but the idea remained hidden in the dim recesses of his brain; and one day, having provided himself with a soda-water bottle which was not filled with soda-water, he walked down to the quay, and stepped on board the *Fusilier*. There was no savage purpose visible in his face; on the contrary, he wore an expression of bland content; and when he had gone forward to the bow, and made himself comfortable in a corner, with his back resting against the bulwarks, he was laughing and talking to himself—chuckling over the folly of the contemporary race of mankind—smiling at his own grim little jokes—and occasionally breaking into gentle song. For Lauchie had not as yet returned to the fold of the Rechabites; the rescue of the schoolmaster had been a great event; and ever since, with but a few intervals of unwilling labour, he had devoted himself to a “terrible keeping-up o’ the New Year.”

The gangway was withdrawn, the hawsers cast off, the paddles struck the green water into a seething white, and

the steamer slowly moved away from the quay. Lauchie was now plaintively singing to himself—

‘There’s nae sorrow there, Jean,
There’s neither could nor care, Jean,
The day’s aye fair
In the Land o’ the Leal!’

“It’s a beautiful song—a beautiful, beautiful song,” he murmured. Then he burst out laughing. “That foolish idiot of a lass! ‘O Mr. MacIntyre, how dare you mention such a thing to me, and you a married man!’ And then says I: ‘But a man that has not got a wife is not a married man; and a man that is not married has as much right to get married as anyone else; and if that is not the law, then it is them that makes the law that have no sense in their head.’” He chuckled again, softly and gleefully. “‘O Mr. MacIntyre, you should not say such things! I am quite frightened to hear you say such things!’” His merriment suddenly ceased. A diligent search had revealed the disastrous fact that in not one of his pockets could a single match be found. And so he was forced to struggle up from that snug corner, and make away for the cabin, where some friendly steward might give him a light for his pipe. And if—as he was in the cabin in any case—and there being a refreshment bar there—if he should take advantage of the opportunity—why——. But Lauchie had disappeared.

When the steamer reached Fort William, he was as blithe and unconcerned as ever; and though he said to himself ‘Aw, Dyca, I will make the bandy-legged carpenter dance a little dance!—I will make his bandy legs jump!’—it was said with perfect good humour. And in this happy mood he landed, passed along the quay, and entered the little town that lies at the foot of the great Ben Nevis. He knew that if he were to find the carpenter at all, he would find him alone; for MacKillop was in a very small way of business, ordinarily working as his own journeyman.

At length he turned into an alley, and came upon a yard filled with all sorts of rubbish—old barrels, broken boats, and sodden shavings—at the further end of which was a shed. The shed was empty; and there was no one about. But there was also a workshop; and without a moment’s

hesitation, Lauchie went over to it, and raised the latch, and opened the door. The next moment the two men were staring at each other—the one in paralysed alarm, the other with a grim sort of humour. Then Lauchie began to look about him for some instrument; and the little, bandy-legged, red-headed carpenter, instantly divining his enemy's purpose, and seeing no way of escape by the door, which was blocked by Lauchie's tall form, made a single spring for the window, and frantically tried to raise the lower sash. But he tugged and shook in vain, for in his haste he had forgotten to undo the catch; and meanwhile Lauchie had got hold of a portentous beam; so that the luckless carpenter, finding himself caught like a trapped rat, could only throw himself under the table at which he had been planing, in some desperate hope of shelter from the imminent blows. And these came quickly enough; and thud after thud resounded of the unequal fray; but what with his laughing, and what with his somewhat unsteady gait, Lauchie's aim was uncertain.

"Aw, Dyea," he called aloud—but without the least apparent animosity—rather with a kind of hilarious enjoyment—"come out of your hole, you red-headed weasel, and I will smash your brains in!" and therewith he aimed another blow at the carpenter which would undoubtedly have accomplished that object had it not fortunately descended on a crossbar supporting the table. "Come out from your shavings, will you, till I knock your head off your shoulders! Will you come out, now! Do you hear me? Do you think I have come ahl the way to Fort William for nothing? Come away, now! You red-headed weasel, will you come out from your hole?"

And again with a tremendous crash the beam descended—this time, happily, hitting the table itself. Lauchie laughed loudly.

"Aw, Dyea, that a weasel should be afraid to come out like that! Will I get the dogs and worry you out? But no—no, no!—you red-haired son of the devil, I will reach you yet, if I have to keep hammering ahl the day long."

Then something tumultuous, amazing, inconceivable happened. Lauchie vaguely knew that the carpenter had darted out from his retreat and hurled himself against his

(Lauchie's) legs ; there was a wild scuffle and scramble ; the carpenter managed to regain his feet and make for the door ; and when the injured husband, seeking to pursue him and belabour him, would have followed, he—that is to say, Lauchlan MacIntyre—tripped over a plank of wood, he lurched heavily forward, he came down like a log, and there was a splintering crash of glass that told of an appalling and irremediable catastrophe.

For a time Lauchie lay motionless, while the peccant carpenter was fleeing away into safety. And when he slowly rose, there could be no doubt as to the calamity that had occurred ; his nether garments were saturated ; a pocket of his coat was filled with broken glass. More in sorrow than in anger, he pulled out these fragments of the soda-water bottle, and dropped them in the yard ; then with an ever-increasing dejection he made his way along the chief thoroughfare in the direction of the quay ; and it was a perfectly heart-broken man that scated himself on an empty herring-barrel, to await the return of the steamer from Corpach.

When Lauchlan stepped on board the *Fusilier*, on her homeward voyage, he looked neither to the right nor to the left, but went away forward and sate down, his naturally dismal countenance now heavy with gloom. It was at this moment that a little man dressed all in Sunday black, and with a tall hat on his head, came up to him and said, sympathetically—

“How are ye, Mr. MacIntyre ? I'm afraid ye look rather down in the mouth.”

“I've had a sad loss, Mr. Robertson,” answered Lauchie—but he paid little heed to the Free Kirk elder, who was returning from Achnasheen, where he had been engaged with others in protesting against the Declaratory Act.

“So I have heard—so I have heard,” said the elder, with compassion ; he knew the story of Lauchie's domestic misfortunes.

“The best Glenlennan,” Lauchie murmured to himself.

“Do ye say that now ?” rejoined the other. “The best in all the glen, was she ? It's grievous to think how time changes us poor mortal creatures !”

“Seven years in bond,” continued the doleful shoemaker.

"Indeed, indeed!" said the elder, shaking his head sadly. "Seven years in the bonds of iniquity. I had little idea there were such goings-on, over so long a time."

"But there was no help for it—no help," Lauchie murmured again, talking to himself mostly, with his eyes bent on the deck. "It was bound to happen the moment I fell."

The elder started.

"You fell likewise?" he exclaimed, in an awestricken voice. "Dear, dear, that ye should have to tell me that! But the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

"Nothing left but bits o' glass—and all the fine stuff gone. There was nearly a whole mutchkin. I was saving it up for the trip home. Seven years' old Glenlennan!"

The elder stared at him, partly in amazement, partly in anger.

"Mr. MacIntyre, are ye in your senses? In the name of mercy what are ye talking about?"

"Seven years' old Glenlennan," Lauchie repeated mournfully. "And when I fell the bottle went all to splinters."

"Ay, the bottle," replied the other, sharply. "I'm thinking ye've been paying too much attention to the bottle of late. And you that was a Rechabite——"

"And I am a Rechabite. From this moment I am a Rechabite," continued Lauchlan, doggedly. "As sure as death, Mr. Robertson. I'm determined this time. From this moment, not a drop. You'll see—you'll see. And on the strength of it, now, we'll just go down below and have a tasting——"

"Me?" said the elder. "Me, that has an example to set—unworthy as I am——"

"Then I draw back," interposed Lauchie, with decision. And he went on, assuming a certain solemnity of air: "And who will be responsible for that? Who but yourself, Mr. Robertson? It is you that have refused to pluck a brand from the burning."

The argument was irresistible. Together they went down to the cabin to celebrate and confirm the most recent of Lauchie's many conversions; and as the story of Allan Henderson's mishap and rescue had to be told all over again,

they were still sitting in the cabin when the *Fusilier* arrived at Duntroone.

One day at this time, Barbara Maclean was seated at the window of her room, sewing, with an occasional glance into the street below, when she saw Jack Ogilvie pass along the other side of the thoroughfare. It was a chance she had been looking forward to, perhaps watching for : immediately she rose, threw aside her work, and began with great rapidity to array herself in such out-of-door finery as she possessed, not forgetting to lay her cousin Jessie's stock under contribution. For hitherto she had been unsuccessful in obtaining even a few words of speech with the all too handsome Purser, who had bewildered her senses away on the evening of Mrs. McAskill's dance. Once or twice she had wandered round in the direction of the South Quay ; and she had actually in the distance seen Ogilvie—smarter than ever in his uniform of navy blue and brass buttons—standing by the gangway of the *Aros Castle*, superintending the embarkation of passengers ; but she had not had the courage to go nearer. Perhaps he had forgotten that he had ever met her. He might not even know her name. He had to encounter so many people in the course of his duties.

But now that he had gone along this Campbell Street alone, and would probably return the same way, he might possibly recognise her as he passed. Accordingly, as soon as she had *fichu*, jacket, hat, gloves, and parasol complete, she stole downstairs, and went out on to the pavement. Of course, she could not remain here ; for her aunt's shop was just opposite ; and Mrs. Maclean might happen to look out, and espy her, and wonder what she was doing. But a short way along there was a watchmaker's window into which she had been in the habit of staring ever since she came to Duntroone ; for in it was an ingenious little clock the time of which was kept or rather marked by a tiny gold ball that rolled down an inclined plane, the plane reversing itself at the end of every quarter of a minute ; and this toy had fascinated her so that she would stand unweariedly following the zig-zag course of the small gold sphere. It was in front of this window that she now lingered, her

eyes peeping corner-wise. And before long she became conscious that someone was approaching ; a furtive glance assured her that this was indeed none other than Ogilvie ; and so, with apparent carelessness forsaking the toy-clock, she continued on her way, as if she were not expecting to meet anyone.

It was a quick, light, elate step that now sounded along the pavement : she made certain that in his youthful and joyous audacity and unconcern he would not recollect her or even look her way. As he approached, her heart beat wildly ; her trembling fingers grasped the handle of her parasol as if for support. He drew nearer—she could not raise her eyes—he would go by without a word or a glance. And as a matter of fact he did pass her ; then almost at the same moment he seemed to pause ; she managed to turn her head the least little bit ; and forthwith he came forward to her, in a manner doubtfully, yet with a propitiatory smile.

“Miss Maclean ?” said he, and he raised his cap and held out his hand. “I beg your pardon—I was nearly being very rude—but you remained so short a time the night of Mrs. McAskill’s dance. And how is your cousin, Miss Jessie ?” he went on—for he could see that she was overwhelmingly embarrassed and self-conscious ; and he was a good-natured lad ; and the spectacle of beauty in distress aroused his sympathy. “I heard from her the other day—about the lecture in the Masonic Hall—Allan Henderson the schoolmaster is a great friend of hers and her mother’s, and they are anxious he should have a good audience.”

“And are you going to the lecture ?” said Barbara, finding her voice at last, and even succeeding in letting her eyes question him for a moment.

“Well, I am not so sure,” he made answer. “It is not much in my line ; but if the boat is in in good time, I may go. And I will take one or two tickets whatever.”

Now at this point he ought to have said good-bye, and gone away. But she was a remarkably pretty girl.

“I hope, Miss Maclean,” said he, “that the next time you come to any such gathering, you will stay and join in the dancing. It was quite a disappointment to many of us

that you and your cousin left so early. And I suppose you are as fond of dancing as most other young ladies."

"There was not much dancing in Kilree," said Barbara, blushing furiously.

And then at last he did say good-bye, and raised his cap, and departed; and Campbell Street—though it was high noon—seemed to her to grow dark.

No sooner was he gone than she hurried back to her room, and there she went straight to the mirror, to examine her appearance and her costume from every possible point of view. And then, taking off some of her things, she sat down and pondered—until it was time for her to see about getting ready the mid-day meal.

In the afternoon she was once more alone—that is to say, she was free to leave the house in charge of the girl Christina; and again she wandered out, this time making by a circuitous way for a certain back street. Arrived there, she stopped in front of an entry where a small brass plate informed the public that 'Professor Sylvester, teacher of dancing and calisthenics,' abode within; she hesitated for a second or so: then, summoning up courage, she passed into the dark entry, rang a bell, and inquired if Professor Sylvester were at home. The next thing was that she found herself the sole occupant of a large and empty apartment, almost destitute of furniture save for a bench that went along two of the walls, and a table on which were ranged a number of stone ginger-beer bottles and tumblers.

The door opened, and the professor appeared, violin in hand. He was an elderly, spare, careworn-looking man: his demeanour was submissive and deprecatory; he spoke with a slightly foreign accent when he addressed her. And his terms, when Barbara timidly asked for them, were of the most modest character.

"But I must see where you will begin—I must see what lessons you will need before joining the class," he said. "And I will call in my daughter to be your partner."

He rang the bell. A sandy-haired and rather sulky-looking girl appeared, who, recognising the situation at a glance, took down from a peg on the door a sailor's jacket, and this she donned, no doubt intimating that she had now become a male partner, and was ready, in an impassive

and perfunctory way, to go through her share of the performance. Barbara betrayed the greatest shame and confusion.

"No," said she, "I cannot dance at all. I must begin at the beginning. And could I have lessons without any one looking on?"

"Certainly—certainly," said the grave and worn-eyed professor. "And what time of the day would it please you to come?—for there are generally some young people here in the evening."

There was no difficulty about making final arrangements; and when these were completed, Barbara, leaving the dancing-master's house, returned home by a roundabout route, for she had resolved upon keeping this matter a dark secret from her aunt and her cousin. And so apt and assiduous did she prove to be that in less than ten days' time the professor said to his daughter—

"Eugénie, I do not think in all my life I have known a pupil like that—so quick, so clever, so graceful in every movement. It all comes naturally to her—no effort—no constraint—it is a pleasure to teach her. If she had been trained from infancy she might have had a career."

Eugénie the sulky did not respond. She had formed an unreasoning dislike towards the new pupil—perhaps through jealousy of her elegant figure and her all-conquering and pathetic eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

SCHEMES AND FORECASTS.

THAT was a great occasion when the young schoolmaster, though still something of a cripple, made his first reappearance in Mrs. Maclean's back parlour. The kind-hearted little widow, with covert tears in her lashes, did not know how to tend him and pet him enough; would have him sit in her own armchair; feared he was too near the fire, or too far away from the fire; and generally made such a fuss over him that he had shamefacedly to protest again and

again, for he did not like being treated as a child before Jess.

"Well, indeed," said the widow, as she brought out currant-bun, shortbread, and other elements of festivity, "when something terrible bad has happened, they proclaim a day of general mutilation throughout the country——"

"Humiliation you mean, mother," Jess said, impatiently—she did not mind at other times, but when Allan was present these harmless little mistakes vexed her.

"Exactly that," continued the widow, with much content. "And when something terrible fine happens, like Allan here getting about again, there should be a general rejoicing among us, if one could only manage it. But in the meantime, Jessie, you'll just step across the way and bid Barbara smarten herself up, and come over, directly. Oh, well I know what pleases young folk! When a lad and a lass are thinking of each other, it's little else they think of. Give them a look at each other, and that's enough—so off ye go, Jess."

Despite herself, a shade of mortification passed over Jess Maclean's face when she was thus ordered to go and summon Barbara; for in her capacity of nurse she had established a sort of proprietary right in this fractious invalid; and now that he had come to report himself convalescent, she thought it hard that any half-stranger should be allowed to intervene. But she was a biddable lass; she whipped on her shawl and bonnet, and went away to execute her mission; the only thing was that on her return she did not accompany Barbara into the parlour. She remained in the front shop. And at the same moment—whether out of mischief or out of sympathetic consideration—Mrs. Maclean made some excuse and joined her daughter; so that Barbara Maclean and the young schoolmaster found themselves alone together in the hushed little room.

"It is I that am pleased to see you going about again," she said in Gaelic, and she gave him her hand for a moment, and then composedly took a seat.

"And surely," said he in the same tongue, "my first visit was due to the house that has been so kind to me."

He had paled slightly on her entrance; but now the joy of actually beholding her had recalled something of colour and animation to his face; his dark and glowing

eyes drank their fill of her, and yet were never satisfied. How beautiful she was—so much more beautiful than the phantom image of her that had occupied his waking dreams ; his covetous longing to secure this glorious creature all to himself seemed to run riot in mad fancies ; something appeared to whisper to him that, now when at last she was so near him, he must seize her hands, and hold them tight, and say to her ‘ You are mine—you are mine—you cannot go away from me—not any more, for ever.’ Meanwhile Barbara was twiddling with the lace frills of her cuffs.

“ And you,” he continued—getting some mastery over himself, and dismissing these delirious imaginings, “ You I am sure have found the house a kind house, with a warm hearth for you.”

“ Oh, yes, indeed,” replied Barbara, rather indifferently.

“ The night of the wreck of the *Sanda*,” he went on—his glowing eyes still dwelling on her—his nostrils sensitive to the scent of her costume—“ I thought you were lonely and sad enough ; but I told you you were going to a friendly home, and I knew that a friendly home you would find it. And who but I was the first one to meet you ?—so that ever since I have thought of you, and been anxious to know that you were well looked after ; and not like one strayed into a strange fold. Many is the time I would like to have sent along to ask you to come and see me, that you might talk about yourself ; but I was not so bold, to disturb you. But I often heard of you ; and I was sure that from your aunt and your cousin you would have the kindest of treatment——”

“ Indeed I have nothing to complain of,” Barbara said—with a glance towards the glass door : perhaps she was surprised that she was being left alone in this fashion.

“ When a man lies sick in bed he has time to think of many things,” the schoolmaster proceeded—not quite knowing how to make use of these invaluable moments—having so much to say, and yet in a bewilderment of hesitation as to how far he dared go—“ and above all things I was anxious you should understand and be sure that you were among people who wished you well. And perhaps, here or there, might be one whose interest in you was warmer than that—if the time was come to speak——”

Perhaps she comprehended his meaning ; perhaps not ; at all events she somewhat abruptly rose, and said—

“I am wondering what my aunt is about, and Jessie : it is not usual for them to neglect you in this way.”

And with that she went to the windowed door, and opened it, and looked into the front shop. But at this moment the arrival of a new visitor—a stormy visitor—absorbed attention : it was the town-councillor, who had come hastily along on hearing of Allan’s having adventured forth ; and now he was all excitement and importance in his desire to dominate such a situation ; he drove the Macleans before him into the parlour—the door being left a bit open as was customary.

“Man, Allan,” he cried. “I’m just delighted to see ye here again, among your own kith and kin, and in a cosy circle too. And I’ve news for ye, lad, I’ve news for ye ; if ye’ll not think I have been taking too great a liberty ; but I hardly expected to see ye about so soon, and so I have been making inquiries on your behalf. Yes, indeed,” continued Mr. McFadyen, with great vivacity—regarding himself as the hero of the hour, no doubt, and conscious that Jess Maclean’s eyes were upon him—“the moment Miss Jessie put that idea of the Latin class into my head says I to myself, ‘Well, if Allan is laid by the heels, and cannot look after this matter, it’s just me that’s going to do it for him.’ And I’ve found a splendid room for ye—the very ticket : the top floor at Ross and MacLagan’s, the lawyers ; and I’m sure they’ll be reasonable about it, for it’s empty, and not a bit of use to them. And just as I was thinking it would cost ye a stiff penny to put benches and desks into it, then I chanced to hear of the Masonic Hall folk wanting to sell off a lot of their old chairs, and says I to myself ‘If we can get them cheap, they’ll just do fine.’ Then I went to the office of the *Times and Telegraph*, and saw the manager, and he says if ye’ll give him the advertisement by the year, he’ll take it on the easiest terms ; in fact, he was hinting it might not cost ye anything if you would do some writing for the paper at odd hours——”

“No, no,” said Allan, frowning, “I will not have it that way.”

But Peter McFadyen was not the man to be daunted.

"Just as ye like—just as ye like," he said, blithely. "And that's not all the news. For I've been asking a question here and there, I hope in a discreet kind of way, and I find there's several of my own friends would like their boys to get an hour or two's Latin after the office-work or the shop-work was over; and that's how it stands, Allan, my lad, that as soon as you care to start, I'll guarantee ye'll have quite a respectable size of a class within a fortnight; and there's no reason why such a class should not go on growing bigger and bigger, for I find it is greatly wanted in Duntroone."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you, Mr. McFadyen," the young schoolmaster said, "and especially to Miss Jessie, for it was she that first thought of it. It's a good thing to have friends."

He ventured to glance towards Barbara. Was she betraying any interest in these poor schemes of his? Nay, could he dare to hope that she was personally concerned in them? But Barbara was staring into the fire, with abstracted gaze.

The councillor, who evidently regarded himself as the founder of Allan's fortunes, now proceeded to prophesy great things; and he was in a humorous mood as well; those were gay pictures he drew of the future. Even the little widow was constrained to remark—

"Well, Mr. McFadyen, it's you that are in high spirits the night. But take care. Do you remember the old saying '*You are too merry, you'll have to marry.*'"

The warning only increased the councillor's jocosity.

"Faith, that's a good one!" he cried, with a prodigious laugh. "Me marrying? Is that your advice, Mrs. Maclean? That's a fine idea, to be sure—the idea of me marrying!"

"I do not see what there is to laugh at!" the widow protested.

"Well, then, I'll tell you what stands in the way," he said, with sudden gravity—but it was only part of his profound facetiousness. "There's one very good reason, and one's enough; and the reason is that I'm too bashful. Ay, there it is—that's the truth."

With beaming face and demurely twinkling eyes he

glanced from one to the other : to himself the notion of his being bashful—a man of the world like himself being bashful—was irresistibly comic.

“I do not know about that,” said the downright little widow ; “but when I was young, if a man had made up his mind about the girl he wanted to marry, I’m thinking there was not much difficulty about his finding words to ask her. Maybe it is different nowadays. Nowadays it seems to be money first, and your sweetheart second. Here have you yourself, Mr. McFadyen, been planning out all that Allan is to be, and the grand things he is to do ; and yet never a word about his taking a wife—though perhaps there would be no great need for him to go far afield.”

These words were spoken with smiling significance—the widow being clearly proud of her diplomacy ; but nothing short of consternation ensued. Jessie looked particularly distressed ; Barbara betrayed less confusion—indeed she appeared to treat this open innuendo as of little import. As for the young man who had thus been almost invited to choose one of the cousins, he maintained a stern silence. It was the councillor who came to the general relief.

“If there’s one thing in the world I would like,” he said, “it’s just this—that the five of us that are here at this moment could get away for a trip to London to see the sights. Wouldn’t that be worth while ?—just by ourselves—a little party—and I’ve been to London myself—— I know my ways about—I could show ye all the fine things that belong to the nation, and therefore they belong just as much to you or to me as to anybody else.”

“Indeed there’s truth in what ye say, Mr. McFadyen,” the schoolmaster put in. “And maybe John Smith—the common man, the poor man—would be a little better contented with his lot if he only remembered what great possessions are his, and what has been done to please him. If John Smith were a philosopher, he would begin and ask questions. For whose delight, for whose use, are splendid public buildings built, and bridges thrown across rivers, and handsome embankments made ? These belong to him—the poor man—to John Smith. What Prince or Duke has a collection of pictures like the National Gallery ?—that is John Smith’s. The gems and antiquities and

books of the British Museum, the art treasures at South Kensington—what private collection has anything to compare with them?—and they all belong to John Smith, who has no trouble about them, no fear of being swindled, the best experts of the world buying for him everywhere. The Queen has a fine garden behind Buckingham Palace; but it's not a third as big as Hyde Park—which is John Smith's domain. For I've been to London too, Mr. McFadyen," continued the schoolmaster, who could talk freely and spiritedly enough when his sombre fits of silence were abandoned, "and I've seen the Green Park, Regent's Park, Battersea Park, and the rest of them, and their ornamental waters, and their great staff of gardeners—all kept up for the public use. What Duke or Marquis has a hall to compare with Westminster Hall—where plain John Smith can walk up and down at any time of the day and eat an orange in contentment? Royal Processions to St. Paul's—Lord Mayor's Shows—pageants of that kind are designed for the poor man, not the rich. And if we here, Mr. Couneillor, should ever go to London together, and when you'll be taking us to the British Museum or to South Kensington, you'll just have to drop a word now and again reminding us that these are our own collections, and better than any other in the land, and kept up for us with the greatest care. I wonder now," he said, turning to Mrs. Maclean, "I wonder, when Mr. McFadyen goes with us to the National Gallery, if he'll remember his position. Will he take us up to the famous Raphael, and say to us: 'This is my last great acquisition: I had to pay a little trifle of £70,000 before I could get it away from Blenheim Palace.'"

The practical little widow was puzzled by these vagaries: her answer was more to the point.

"So you would be off to London, the lot of you?" she said, cheerfully enough. "Well, well, that's natural for young folk; but such gaddings about are no for an old body like me. I'm tied to the premises; I'm a fixture here as much as a shelf or a gasalier——"

"Not at all—we'll not stir without ye," Peter insisted, gallantly. "Not one step will we stir. You'll just have to get somebody ye can trust to take your place in the shop; then off we go—like school-children for a holiday. It's

but right—it's but right, Mrs. Maclean. Year after year we keep on working and working : are we never to give ourselves a bit treat ? I'll undertake to say there's not one in this room has seen the Queen. But we've a right to see her ; for she's a part of the Constitution that we pay for. Dod, man, Allan, ye put bold ideas into folks' heads ; for if everything belongs to John Smith, and if I am John Smith—as ye plainly intimate—then I am the richest man in Europe ; and surely the richest man in Europe should be able to afford a trip to London. What d'ye say, Mrs. Maclean ? And you're coming with us, mind. Not a foot will we stir without ye. My word, we'll make things lively in the big town ! ”

But it was not until Mr. McFadyen and Allan had left the hospitable little parlour, and started off for home, that the councillor revealed the secret reason for his thus insisting on a quite chimerical project.

“ Did ye see how I managed it ? ” he said, with great exultation. “ Did ye see how natural-like I led them on to look on us all as forming a family-party—that's you and Barbara, and me and Jessie, with the old lady as general friend and adviser. For it doesna do to frighten them at first. It's like taming a wild animal—ye must be cautious and slow and cunning. Dod, man,” exclaimed the councillor, honestly, “ I think I showed a little skill ! Did I not, now ?—did I not ? ”

Allan was silent : his thoughts were elsewhere. But Mr. McFadyen was not to be discouraged.

“ What care I,” he continued, gleefully, “ whether such a trip as that to London is impracticable or no ? Jessie and Barbara have been led into thinking of the four of us being there together, with perhaps the old lady left behind in Duntroone. And of course that would mean two weddings—two weddings, you rascal !—and when the two weddings come about, you'll just tell me if I did not show a little tact and address in paving the way and making everything easy.”

“ I do not like the sound of the wind,” said Allan, absently staring out towards the moaning and inscrutable sea. “ It is going to be a wild night.”

“ Ye're a clever chiel,” Allan,” continued the complacent

councillor, as the two men paused for a second at the parting of their ways, "and your head is just filled with learning and knowledge. But it takes experience of the world, it takes experience of human nature, to manage a difficult affair like this ; and maybe you'll be the first to acknowledge as much—maybe you'll be ready to confess that much—when you and Barbara and Jessie and myself find ourselves in a carriage together, driving about and seeing the sights of London."

The schoolmaster did not reply. With a brief "Good-night !" he turned away—and disappeared into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PTARMIGAN BROOCH.

It was indeed a wild night—the wind howling in the chimneys and shaking the windows, the rain falling in torrents, the long swish of the waves heard all along the shore ; but towards morning there came a sudden and unaccountable calm ; and daybreak revealed a brooding stillness over land and sea—revealed a slate-hued world, vague, and dull, and sombre, with the mountains of Mull and Morven hidden behind a dark, formless, impenetrable wall of vapour. Nevertheless, sullen as the outlook might be, there was steady progress towards the light. Up in the high portals of the east, a curious kind of glare began to elbow its way through the heavy masses of cloud ; the slopes of Kerrara answered in warm tones of saffron and orange and golden-green ; as the hours went by, the heavens became more and more broken up ; by noon there were shafts of sunlight here and there, and a vivid and welcome blue in the far stretches of water outside the bay ; while the Mull and Morven hills were gradually returning into the visible universe, after their sojourn in unknown space.

And perhaps it was merely this unexpected clearing-up of the morning that drew Barbara Maclean away from her household duties ; but at all events, before going out, she

dressed herself with unusual care, for the better display of such small articles of finery as she possessed. When eventually she left the house, she took her way along the sea front, apparently with no very set purpose. She passed the railway-station. She reached the South Quay, at which the *Aros Castle* was lying ; but, as a single swift and covert glance assured her, no officer was visible on board ; it was not yet time for the steamer to sail, and at present the only work going forward was the trundling-in of barrow-loads of coal from the adjoining trucks. She continued her seemingly aimless stroll. She arrived at the foot of the Gallows Hill ; and here she lingered about for some little time, looking at the nets and boats and white-washed cottages that are a survival from the time when Duntroone was little more than a fishing village. The sunlight was becoming more and more general. There was a spring-like mildness and sweetness in the air. The waters of the bay were now a shining azure as well as the further plain ; and the long spur of Kerrara shooting out into them, was of burning gold.

And when she turned to make her way back again, she was regarding an equally cheerful scene—the wooded hills, the houses dotted on the slopes, the ivied castle at the point, the ethereal mountains of Morven beyond the blue ; and it was but natural that when she came to the coal-trucks, she should go outside, otherwise her view would have been debarred. But passing outside the coal-trucks brought her close to the *Aros Castle*—indeed, she had to go by within touching distance of the gangway ; and it was at this moment that she chanced to raise her eyes—and behold ! here was the Purser, talking to a friend. He immediately turned from his companion, and addressed her as she approached.

“Are you going a trip with us to-day, Miss Maclean ?”

“Oh, no,” she answered, in pretty confusion ; “I—I only went to have a look at the old part of the town.”

“Then if you will come on board,” said he, politely, “we will take you across to the North Quay, and it will save you the walk round. We are off in a few minutes now.”

“Oh, thank you indeed,” said she, with modest and smiling eyes ; and forthwith she passed along the gangway,

he following ; and she stepped on to the upper deck—which was very different from any part of the old *Sanda*, for here everything was trim and smart, the paint and varnish fresh and clean, the brass-work as brilliant as polish could make it. And Ogilvie fetched a deck-chair for her, though she did not care to be seated ; the run across to the North Quay would not be of long duration.

He chatted pleasantly to her for a little while, about the ordinary topics of Duntroone ; and Barbara did her best to answer with animation and accord, though at times she was a little hampered for want of the proper English phrase. One thing she did manage : she cured him of the habit of calling her “Miss Maclean.”

“My name is Barbara,” she said, almost with reproach.

“I’m sure I beg your pardon, Miss Barbara—I ought to have remembered——”

“But how could you remember ?” said she, coyly ; “I am sure now you do not recollect where it was that we first met.”

“Indeed, I do, then,” he answered at once. “And the next time we meet on such an occasion, I will look to you to give me a dance.”

“I hope so,” murmured Barbara, with some touch of colour, and lowered eyes.

The train crept into the station ; and presently a few passengers made their appearance, coming towards the *Aros Castle*. Among the first of these to reach the gangway were a lady and her two daughters, the latter tall, fair-haired, English-looking girls, with good features and distinguished bearing. As the little stout mamma stepped on deck, she bestowed a brief nod of recognition upon the Purser, who respectfully raised his cap ; then she and her charges went below to the saloon, to deposit there their wraps and rugs and books.

“That is Mrs. Stewart of Innistroan,” said Jack Ogilvie to Barbara, in a confidential whisper.

Almost immediately thereafter the three ladies reappeared ; and the mother, coming over to where the Purser was standing, said—perhaps a trifle brusquely—

“Can I speak with you for a moment, Mr. Ogilvie ?”

Barbara was thus left alone ; but she could all the more

carefully study the dress and bearing of these three newcomers, whom Ogilvie seemed to regard with considerable deference. Ordinarily he was rather off-hand in his manner ; but now, in speaking to this Mrs. Stewart—probably about some business-matter—he was quite subdued and attentive. And as for the two girls, about whom Barbara was chiefly curious : she could not but be conscious of their air of distinction, however simply and plainly they might be dressed. Something, she knew not what, told her they were of “the gentry.” With intense but concealed scrutiny she watched their demeanour as they listened to the Purser ; she observed the half-indifferent look, the occasional glance towards the surrounding neighbourhood. As for their costume, it seemed to be the perfection of unostentatious neatness and fitness ; the only ornament that each wore—so far as she could see—was an insignificant little brooch consisting of a ptarmigan’s foot set in silver, that fastened the collar of the blue serge jacket.

But by this time the hawsers had been thrown off, and the *Aros Castle* was moving across to the other Quay. Ogilvie came back to Barbara.

“This is a very short sail you have taken with us,” he said to her, in his easy and familiar way, as they were approaching the pier. “Some other time you and Miss Jessie must go for a run with us to Tobermory, and there we will pick you up on our way back. I know that Mrs. Maclean has friends at Tobermory.”

The steamer was now slowing ; and it turned out that Barbara was the only passenger that meant to land. When the gangway had been shoved out, she timidly took her purse from her pocket—it was probably but poorly furnished.

“Will you tell me——” she said, bashfully, when he interrupted her : he had noticed that little movement.

“No, no ; no, no,” said he, smiling, and he put up his hand in a deprecatory fashion. “You must not think of such a thing. We shall only be too glad to take you across the bay, any time you happen to be on the other side. And tell Miss Jessie she must bring you for a longer sail.”

She said good-bye, and stepped ashore ; she watched the passengers embark, and the *Aros Castle* steam away again ;

soon she lost sight of Ogilvie, who had apparently gone below ; and the last figures she could make out were those of the two tall young ladies, who had seemed to possess so strange and mysterious a quality of attraction and perfection, even to the fancy of a girl.

When she went up into the town, she met her cousin Jess, who had been along to buy some wool ; and as they proceeded home together, they encountered Lauchlan MacIntyre. The shoemaker was of morose aspect.

"You'll be coming to the lecture to-morrow night, Mr. MacIntyre ?" said Jess, pleasantly.

"I'm not so sure," responded Long Lauchie, in melancholy tones. "It seems a fearfu' waste of opportunity. To think of a lecture on such things as songs, when there's but the one subject that is of tremendous concern to us, and that's the crying evil that is ruining us as a nation. Ay, just ruining us—ruining us—the curse of drink that is destroying the kinty from end to end. And what can we do, but wrestle with it, in Parliament and out of Parliament, in season and out of season, ay, and mek every election turn on it, and every candidate pledged for total abolition, ay, and have a section of the Rechabites in every fullage everywhere, until we put down and stamp out this terrible, terrible drink. There must be no peace until the whisky traffic is wholly rooted out ; and until a brand is put on a man that would be seen to enter a public-house—ay, a just persecution—a lawful persecution—there must be no moderation—no mercy——"

"But you'll drive common-sense folk into rebellion," Jess said, good-humouredly. "Would you have them take to drink in self-defence ?"

"Aw, to hear you talk like that, and you at your years !" said the shoemaker, almost in despair. "As sure's death it's just fearful to hear one of your years talk like that. And to think that you are on the side of the drunkards, and the licensed victuallers, and Sodom and Gomorrah. But there's time for ye yet. If you'll tek a warning, ye may turn yet. You'll come over to us—ay—you'll come over to us and be saved—as sure as death, you'll be saved."

"Well, indeed, Mr. MacIntyre," said Jess—and her pretty grey eyes, that at times were rather inclined to

sarcasm, were now perfectly demure, "I'm not afflicted with any great craving except now and again for a cup of tea ; but when the hour of trial comes—when I have to fight the demon—it will be a great thing for me to have an example to look to. And you'll give me a word of encouragement——"

"I will, I will," said the shoemaker, solemnly and sadly ; and with that he continued on his way ; while Jess turned to her cousin Barbara, who had for some time been staring into the window of the jeweller's shop.

It was a favourite resort of hers. For here she could feast her eyes on treasures that were far beyond her means—silver fastening-pins set with lemon-yellow, and white, and clear lilac cairngorms—scent-bottles inlaid with the various clan tartans—brooches, bracelets, necklets studded with Iona stones—ear-rings, finger-rings, sleeve-links, lockets—tray after tray of fascinating nick-nacks of the very names of many of which she was entirely ignorant. And at this moment, when Jess said—

"Will you wait a moment, Barbara, or will you come into the shop ? I want Mr. Boyd to see what is the matter with my watch——"

—Barbara accepted the invitation with a secret joy ; though it was in a timorous kind of fashion that she followed her cousin into this magician's palace of wonders and splendours. She looked all round the jeweller's shop with an awe-stricken air ; and then her eyes came back to the glass cases on the counter, where there was an endless variety of surprisingly beautiful objects. Not only that, but a tray of brooches, that a customer had been inspecting just before they came in, remained open on the top of one of the cases ; so that if she chose she could take up any one of those marvels for closer examination. And so while Mr. Boyd—who was an old friend of the Macleans, and a solicitous, kindly, amiable sort of man—was inquiring into the state and condition of Jessie's watch, Barbara was passing in review these priceless things, comparing and admiring and coveting. But in especial she was attracted by the brooch that occupied the place of honour in the middle of the tray. It was formed of a ptarmigan's foot, set in gold, with a deep yellow cairngorm above and

another stone of the same kind and colour fixed in the middle claw. Now the ptarmigan brooches worn by the two young ladies who were on board the *Aros Castle*—and whom Jack Ogilvie seemed to treat with so much respect—were very plain and simple ornaments ; here was something of a similar character, but more rich and resplendent, and better calculated for purposes of display. Alas ! she knew too well that it was far away out of the reach of her small savings ; such means and methods of drawing attention, of compelling admiration, were for people whose purses were abundantly filled.

Ultimately it was decided that the recusant watch should be left behind ; and then, business over, Mr. Boyd proceeded to a little neighbourly gossip, in the course of which Barbara was introduced to him, her beautiful eyes winning favour as usual. The friendly jeweller sent his best regards to the widow ; and finally Jessie and Barbara left the shop.

But they had gone only a few yards when Mr. Boyd came after them—he had not stayed to put on any kind of head-covering.

“Miss Maclean,” said he, and simultaneously both girls turned. “I beg your pardon, but did you happen to notice a gold ptarmigan-brooch—it was in a tray on the counter——”

At the same moment there was a slight click as of something dropping on the pavement. He glanced downwards.

“Oh, here it is,” he said ; and he stooped and picked it up.

For a second there was silence. The watchmaker looked grave and troubled ; Jess appeared to be astonished and perplexed rather than frightened ; Barbara, timid as a fawn as she ordinarily was, alone remained perfectly impassive in countenance.

“It must have caught on to some part of your dress,” said Mr. Boyd, slowly, and with some constraint. “Well, I’m sorry to have caused you any trouble.” And thereupon and with no further word he returned to his shop.

But on the evening of this same day, sitting by his fireside, John Boyd seemed thoughtful and depressed ; and his wife would insist on knowing the reason. And at last,

under severe injunctions of secrecy, he revealed to her the story.

"I cannot tell what to think," he continued, as if communing with himself. "I made the excuse, then and there, for the sake of my old friend Mrs. Maclean. And maybe it was true: maybe their dress did catch up the brooch. Such things have happened. For how can I believe that Jessie Maclean, or this cousin of hers, that seems a nice, modest, quiet sort of a girl, would knowingly lift a piece of jewellery from the counter and carry it away? I cannot believe it. And then, ye see, goodwife, I did not actually find it in the possession of either of them. If I had, it would have been my duty to have called in the police——"

"John!" exclaimed his wife. "Have ye taken leave of your wits? Ay, and if it was the half of your shop in question, would ye bring scandal and disgrace on the remaining years of an old friend? No, no!—not for half the shop, or whole of the shop! I'm better acquainted with ye than ye are yourself, man! And no doubt it was the tassels and bugles that the young girls are so fond of nowadays that catched on to the brooch—no doubt at all that was it!"

"Maybe so, Jean, maybe so," said the watchmaker, who seemed to have been quite unhinged and upset by this incident. "But mind, not one word to any living creature. That is my charge to ye. Not one single word about it to any living creature."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LECTURE AND THEREAFTER.

It wanted but an hour to the lecture, yet Jess Maclean did not stir; she sate silent and absorbed—an unusual mood with her, for she was naturally of a merry temperament; her head was bent over her needlework, and she did not look up when she was spoken to.

"Jess," said her mother, "what has ailed you all the day

long? Anyone would think this should be a great occasion for you—you that has always been so proud of Allan Henderson, and telling us what we might expect of him. And now he is appearing before the public—and a great many people coming to see him—and who should be more pleased than yourself—ay, and more to the front at such a time, for Allan is never tired of saying that you are the best friend and adviser he has got——”

“I am not going to the lecture, mother,” said Jess.

“Well, well, now, and what is the meaning of it all?” the widow demanded. She regarded her daughter a little more narrowly, and was alarmed to see that there were tears in her eyes. “What is the matter, Jess?” she exclaimed.

“What is the matter, mother?—what is the matter?” the girl cried, suddenly bursting into a passionate fit of weeping and sobbing. “How can I go to the lecture—how can I face those people—when I am a suspected thief?”

And there and then, in incoherent fashion, she told the story of the incident of the previous day, over which she had been brooding for four-and-twenty hours and more. Meanwhile the little widow’s indignation was like to have altogether overcome her powers of utterance.

“And that’s John Boyd—that’s John Boyd!” she managed to say at last—though she was about breathless with anger and scorn. “And who but your own father was it that helped him when he had to make a composition with his creditors over twenty years ago, ay, helped to make him the well-to-do man he is this day; and the best of friends we were supposed to be; and now it’s this John Boyd—it’s this John Boyd that comes forward and accuses one of my girls of being a thief!” She rose from her chair and threw aside her work. “Well,” said she, with resolute lips, “this very minute I am going along to have a word with John Boyd. I will see what he means by calling either of my girls a thief——”

“Mother,” interposed Jess, piteously, “he did not say that—he did not say anything of the kind. When he spoke it was to make an excuse. It was Mr. Boyd himself that suggested it was likely the brooch had caught on to the dress of one or other of us. That’s what he said. But all the same I could see what he was thinking. I saw his

look—though I did not quite understand it till afterwards. And ever since I have been going over what happened ; and now—now I know what he was thinking when he picked up the brooch from the pavement. I know it—I know it—I could see it—and—and I never thought to be taken for a thief.” And here there was a fresh burst of crying. “It isn’t for a thief,” she said, between her sobs, “to go to hear Allan’s lecture—and face all those people——”

“Jess,” said Mrs. Maclean, firmly, “you’ll do as I bid ye. You’ll go across to the house, and get yourself dressed and ready, and you’ll put out my best things, and you’ll send Kirsty over to help me to shut up the shop. I was not going to the lecture ; but now I am going ; and I do not care who the people are, but I will show them, when Barbara and you go in, that you can hold up your heads with any. And as for John Boyd——”

“Mother, you must not quarrel with Mr. Boyd,” pleaded Jess. “It was only natural he should be startled. And he is an old friend——”

“Ay, and you do not know the saying, then ? ” retorted the little widow, sharply, “ ‘ *Friendship is as it’s kept.* ’ The man that suspects either you or Barbara of being a thief is no friend of mine. But away with ye, now, and get ready—if Barbara will let you have five minutes of the looking-glass, for she’s a fearfu’ creature for making much of herself and decking herself up. And when Mr. McFadyen comes, you will tell him he must get me a ticket and I will pay him for it afterwards.”

Peter McFadyen was an important and a consequential man this night. The provost, who had consented to preside at the meeting, had been summoned away to Edinburgh on business connected with the town ; and the senior councillor, nothing loth, had been prevailed on to take his place. And fully sensible of his responsibility was Peter. When the members of the Literary and Scientific Association, and their friends, with many of the towns-folk, and a few representatives of the neighbouring gentry, were at length assembled in the Masonic Hall, the chairman was in nowise facetious and droll—as if he were in Mrs. Maclean’s back-parlour ; he was dignified, and measured of speech. And

when, in formally introducing the lecturer to the audience, he had pronounced a pompous little eulogium, which caused Allan to look particularly uncomfortable, Mr. McFadyen thereafter glanced down towards the Macleans, who were seated in the front row, it was plain he would have said—‘Do you perceive that now? A man may be sprightly and jocular enough in the freedom of private society, and yet know how to perform his public duties with proper state and decorum.’ Alas! Jessie Maclean never looked his way—paid no heed to him. She was intently regarding Allan—she was tremblingly anxious that he should betray no nervousness—in her heart she was beseeching this audience to be kind and attentive and sympathetic. Barbara, who had adorned herself with her most effective finery, kept covertly watching the door: the handsome Purser had not yet put in an appearance—perhaps the *Aros Castle* was late, perhaps he had forgotten the half-implied promise.

Jess need not have been concerned. When the young schoolmaster rose and placed the sheets of his MS. on the stand before him, there was not a trace of nervousness about him; he acknowledged, and barely acknowledged, the friendly reception accorded him; and at once, and in a business-like way, proceeded with his lecture—the main thesis of which was to the effect that, if the German people were to vanish from the face of the earth, leaving only this invaluable collection of Volkslieder, the philosopher of future centuries could reconstruct the nation, with all its desires, aims, habits, and occupations, from these various and artless utterances. But it was when he proceeded to give specimens of the folk-songs—using for the most part his own translations—songs of fiery patriotism, songs of plaintive home-yearning, love-songs and sad farewells, songs of simple family life, songs of banter and merriment, more rarely of sarcasm, joyous drinking songs, songs and choruses of the hunter’s craft, legends and old-world tales—then it was that he captured the interest of his audience, and was rewarded by frequent if timid outbursts of applause. It was the non-literary ballad that he chose by preference—the voice of the common people; but he could not well exclude Heine’s ‘Pilgrimage to Kevlaar,’ or Uhland’s

'Landlady's Daughter,' for they also were of the people. And when he repeated a lover's passionate appeal to his sweetheart, or told some pathetic story of half-forgotten times, was he not really addressing, out of all this audience, only one? There was some comparison of these German folk-songs with the Gaelic songs of the West Highlands, and mention made of one or two well-known favourites: all this was meant for Barbara—since she had been so graciously kind as to come to the lecture.

And yet it may be doubted whether Barbara heard anything more than an occasional word or phrase, conveying next to nothing. She had abandoned any hope she may have entertained of seeing Jack Ogilvie appear at the door of the hall; and now her attention was turned to the hall itself, the like of which she had never beheld before. For over the deep red walls hung a wonderful ceiling of clear grey-blue; and at the further end of the ceiling a golden sun sent out flashing rays, while at the other extreme shone a silver moon surrounded by seven stars. Then all round the room were mysterious devices; and there were painted pillars; and an arch; and in the keystone of the arch an eye that glared at her as if out of some vague immensity. Compass, square, and trowel she might or might not understand—they were commonplace emblems; but this immovable eye seemed to have some incomprehensible and compelling power of scrutiny; it fascinated her; she could not get away from that relentless gaze. And so, if she did listen at all, it was in a mechanical fashion. 'Prinz Eugen der edle Ritter,' 'Doctor Eisenbart,' 'Der Jäger aus Kurpfalz,' had apparently but little interest for her.

Nevertheless, something did at last happen to arouse her from her apathetic dreaming. The lecturer had been giving examples of the better-known of the German bacchanalian songs—'Crambambuli,' 'Im kühlen Keller,' and the like—when, to everybody's amazement, a tall and gaunt form was seen to rise in the very midst of the assemblage. It was Long Lanchie, the shoemaker. For a moment he seemed frightened at his own temerity, and looked round in a helpless way; but there was an inward monitor to support him; the next second he had found his speech.

"I am not wishing to interrupt," he said, in Gaelic, but

every man has his duty, and I will not stand by and be listening in silence——”

“Order, order,” called the chairman, with a portentous frown.

But the shoemaker, pale as he was on finding himself in this novel position, with all eyes turned towards him, was not to be deterred.

“It is I that must make my protest, if there is to be such praise for drinking, and not a word of warning to the young——”

“Order, order,” the chairman called out again; and then he added, with still greater severity: “MacIntyre, sit down, and behave yourself!”

Meanwhile the lecturer had stopped, and was calmly waiting to hear what Long Lauchie had to say. It was Mrs. Maclean who was most violently indignant over the interruption.

“That tipsy maniac!” she exclaimed, in an undertone. “Will nobody put him out? To bring disgrace on a meeting like this, and Allan going on just splendid!”

“Such praise of the sin of drinking,” continued the shoemaker, doggedly, “I will set my face against, no matter how many there may be to cry me down. I have no word to say against the young man, Allan Henderson; it is not I that have a word to say against him; but when I hear such fearful things repeated, I am bound to lift up my voice. Yes, indeed. Is there anyone here that knows what drink is doing in this land—what terrible, terrible things are happening all through the whisky——?”

“Lauchlan MacIntyre,” called out the chairman—who was beside himself with rage and shame on finding his authority thus scouted, “if you do not instantly resume your seat, I will ask one or two of the young men near you to remove you from this assembly. Do you hear me, now? Will you sit down?”

“Drink,” the shoemaker went on, “is the ruin and curse of this country—it is bringing a judgment upon us——”

“Then I do call on the young men,” broke in Peter, with concealed fury. “Remove him! You there near him, remove that person! Put him out. I, as chairman of this meeting, authorise you to put him out.”

Well, there were two or three of the younger lads only too glad to have a little bit of fun : and the luckless shoemaker—offering no physical resistance, it is true, but still insisting on his conscientious protest against anything that savoured of the praise of drink—was haled away and conducted to the door, and ejected into the night. Thereafter peace and harmony were restored : and the lecture was continued and ended in the most satisfactory manner, a unanimous vote of thanks to the schoolmaster bringing the proceedings to a close.

And very lively and content was the little supper-party that later on assembled at Mrs. Maclean's—a supper-party limited to five, at the cunning suggestion of the councillor. For, said he they could be much merrier, with less of restraint, when they were 'by themselves'; and 'by themselves' had come to mean himself and Jess, and Allan and Barbara, with the widow as hostess and guardian. This, therefore, was the circle now gathered round the hospitable board ; and a very happy little circle it seemed to be. Jess, in especial, was in great spirits ; she was delighted with the way everything had gone off, and at the reception accorded to her hero ; though, as usual, she could not help jibing and mocking at him.

"There's some that pretend to be very masterful, and cool, and undisturbed," said she, darkly. "But when I see a young man that is impatient of every word of introduction—though all kinds of fine things are being said about him—and that is anxious to plunge at once into the business before him, I can tell that he is just as timorous as a mouse, for all his affectation of composure."

"If you mean me, Jessie," said the schoolmaster, laughing, "I will confess this to you, that I think I must have been nervous. I did not know it at the time ; but I guess that it must have been so, from the sensation of relief I have now that it's all over."

"I hope," observed Mr. McFadyen, who still preserved a certain air of state, "I hope I was not too severe in rebuking that fool of a man, MacIntyre——"

"Severe !" cried the little widow, with returning indignation. "He should have been locked up by the police ! To interrupt a meeting in that way ! I

declare it made me feel quite historical—I was like to choke——”

“And I trust there was no undue violence,” continued the councillor, still with something of a grand air, “on the part of the young men who removed him. It was a painful duty that devolved upon me ; but I had to execute it ; and I trust there was no undue violence——”

“Oh, you need not trouble about that, Mr. McFadyen,” Jess said, blithely. “The young lads who carried out your orders—and the shoemaker—did it as peaceably as was possible.”

“Ah, well, ah, well,” said Peter, with a sigh of satisfaction, “it was but a trifling incident, after all ; and one may fairly say that the whole evening was a distinct success. And though in a measure I was responsible for the conduct of the proceedings, still, I do not think I am taking credit to myself when I maintain that everything went off just beautiful. And, mind you, Allan, lad, it’s a great thing for you to keep yourself before the public—you that’s starting the Latin class, and having a fine career before ye, as we all of us hope. It’s a great thing to be known and respected by your fellow-townsmen ; and I was well pleased to see, when ye stood up, that ye had a friendly welcome from them——”

“And what did you think of the Masonic Hall, Miss Barbara ?” said the young schoolmaster, turning abruptly to his neighbour—for he did not like this talk about himself.

“I was never seeing any place like that before,” the girl said. “And I could not understand the meaning of the things on the walls. There was one, in front of me, that was very strange—it looked like a large eye, single and staring——”

“Oh, that is the All-seeing Eye—I suppose, for I am not a mason,” he said.

She regarded him for a moment, doubtfully.

“All-seeing ?” she repeated ; and then she said, with some petulance : “But how can it be All-seeing, when it is only painted on the wall ?”

“It is merely an emblem,” he replied, with great gentleness. “It does not pretend to be anything but a symbol——”

"Is it put there to frighten people?" she demanded, resentfully.

"Why, surely not!"

"Then what is the use of it?—though anyone knows that an eye painted on a wall cannot be seeing anything!" she said. And this was her last word on the subject; and sufficiently enigmatic it was; for he knew nothing of what secret imaginings had been passing through her mind, as she sate and half listened to the discourse about German folk-songs.

Altogether a cheerful and pleasant hour or so, after the serious labours of the evening were over; but it was growing late; and at length Mr. McFadyen and Allan rose to go. Nevertheless, the councillor was still loquacious; for there was to be a great match at golf between the station-master and himself, on the following Monday afternoon; and he was anxious that Jessie, and Barbara, and Mrs. Maclean, too, if that were possible, should witness the contest; and he was discussing this project as he went to the door, both Jess and her mother accompanying him. This was Allan's opportunity—Barbara having remained behind: it was an opportunity thrust upon him, as it were chance-wise—an opportunity he could not, and did not care to, avoid. For he was in a perturbed and reckless mood; the events of the evening had in some measure excited him; still more so the bewilderment of having once again been sitting next this beautiful creature, with glimpses of the raven-black tangles of her hair, and an occasional glance from the deep, clear, mystic eyes. And now, when the others had gone on, he turned to her; she became aware of his approach; a sudden touch of apprehension appeared in her face.

"Barbara," he said—and his tones were low and impassioned, "is it too soon for me to speak?"

She uttered no word—she looked afraid.

"Did you hear what some of those lovers said in the songs?" he went on. "And did you not take it to yourself—as if I were appealing to you? For—for surely you understand. You came to me out of the night and the dark; and now I want you to go with me through the long day—the long day that I hope lies before us two

together. Will you do that, Barbara? Or is it too soon to ask?"

"Yes, yes," she said, with quick relief, "it is that—it is too soon yet——"

"But only too soon?" he urged, seeking in vain for some answering message from those downcast eyes. "Later on, when you have got used to thinking of it, you will not fear to say yes—you will let me hope for that?"

But again she was silent; and here were Jess and her mother returning from the outer staircase; so that for the present there was no assurance for him—only the solace that now she knew what lay in his mind, burning there like a consuming fire.

CHAPTER XIX.

COUNCILLOR v. STATION-MASTER.

EARLY one afternoon, the councillor, the station-master, the station-master's wife, Jess Maclean, and Barbara left the town by way of the Dunstaffnage road, making for the golf-links facing the western sea. And of course Peter McFadyen was the life and soul of this little group; he was overjoyed at Jessie's condescension in coming—indeed this was but part of the marked favour she had shown him ever since he had begun to take an active interest in Allan's welfare; and he was looking forward with delight to another opportunity of displaying his prowess and skill. He talked and laughed and made merry jests; he was all eager anticipation; and when they faced the steep highway leading away from Duntroone, he it was who led, with his chest manfully puffed out.

"There's nothing," he maintained, "like a good stiff walk for giving free play to the muscles; and free play to the muscles is the *seeny quah non* on the links. A soople wrist and a springy ankle—and there ye are! What's the use of standing up like a stick? Dod, I'd like to take half the golfers I see and send them to get lessons from a dancing-master!"

Nor were his high spirits at all damped when the little party had to pass the Cemetery.

"The poor bodies in there," said he, with much cheerfulness, "are at rest; and we'll be the same in our turn. But in the meantime—in the meantime," Peter remarked, with a twinkle in his eye, "my opinion is like that of the idiot-laddie at the funeral: 'I'm glad it's no me.'"

And again when they left the highway to cross Colquhoun's farm he kept in front in order to open the gates; and thus he was enabled to discover that ahead of them there was nothing more formidable than a number of cows, the bull being away down in a hollow near a small loch. Whereupon the cunning Peter affected to regard those animals with some caution.

"That bull of Colquhoun's," said he, turning to the women-folk, "is a terrible ill-natured beast; but the only way is to pay no heed to him; you must not shrink back on any account. You just follow me now when I open the gate——"

Here the station-master—a tall, thin, angular man, with fiery red hair—burst out laughing.

"Peter, my friend," said he, "you need not be afraid of a lot of cows. Yonder's the bull away down by the loch."

Peter looked round and elevated his eyebrows in well-simulated astonishment.

"Yes, indeed," he observed. "I do believe you're right. Not that it matter whether he's there or here. The one way with a bull is to pay no heed to him. If he had been within a yard of this gate, you'd have seen me open it in his face. There's but the one way with a bull," reiterated Peter—as he piloted the women past the cows.

Presently they came within view of the wide western seas and the hills; and a wonderful sight it was; for while all the world around them, both land and water, lay under a mysterious, brooding semi-darkness, because of one unbroken cloud that stretched across the whole of the over-arching heavens, away out by Mull and Morven there appeared to be another world altogether, a world of mountains shining as it were behind a soft veil of sunlight, in ethereal tones of orange-red and silver-grey and rose. No wonder the idle wanderers paused to look; but

the councillor was impatient for the fray, and hurried them on.

Of a sudden Jess stopped.

"What's that?" said she, staring at a whin-bush a little way up the bank. "Is there somebody there? I'm sure I saw something or somebody looking at me—just for a moment——"

"I'll soon find out," said the councillor, valiantly—for in the protection of weak feminine human nature he was afraid of neither robber nor rabbit. At once he sprang up the bank, with surprising agility; he went round by the back of the whins; and there he found Niall Gorach, crouching down like a hare in her form. He got hold of the half-witted lad by the collar, and hauled him into the road.

"Ye young scoundrel, I'll teach ye to go frightening folk in that way——"

But Jess directly interposed.

"Indeed, you will not harm him," said she. "I have not seen Niall since the time he found Allan Henderson lying out among the rocks; and I'm sure we are all very much indebted to him; and, Mr. McFadyen, it would be wiser-like if you were to give the lad a sixpence and he would carry your clubs for you round the links."

Niall looked from one to the other—with perhaps a side glance to see if there was any way of escape from both. But when McFadyen, delighted to obey Jess in all things, promptly unslung from his shoulder his bag of golfing implements and handed it over, the half-witted creature took possession of it in quite a docile way, and then he turned to her who had interceded for him.

"Am I to get a sixpence?" he asked, timidly.

"Yes, indeed," said Jess, in friendly fashion.

"And he'll not strike me?"

"He is not thinking of any such thing!" she answered him—and the assurance seemed sufficient.

A few minutes thereafter Niall sidled up to her again, and said in an undertone—

"I'll show ye the white stag."

"What white stag?" she asked, with her grey eyes smiling in a way that generally inspired confidence.

"The white stag that's in the sanctuary of the Creannoch Forest. There's none but me has seen it. I'll take you there—I'll show it to ye." But at this point Niall's services were required; they had arrived at the teeing-ground; the great contest was about to begin.

And now the councillor, to whom had been accorded the honour of opening the game, selected his driver and took out from the pocket one of the cream-white balls. But he was very jocular all the same; he wished to show that, even in the presence of these fair spectators, he was not in the least nervous; other players might play in solemn silence—he was not to be tyrannised over by either precept or custom. And he was still talking and jesting as he stooped down to form a little tee of sand, on the top of which he placed his ball; and even when he rose again, and got hold of his club, the inward seriousness that had possession of him was not allowed to appear on his face.

"You'll just stand well back," said he, facetiously, "for golf-clubs sometimes run away wi' the player, and I would not like to do you an injury."

Then he addressed himself to the ball; he heaved his shoulders slightly, to make sure that everything was free; he took a last look at the far height which it was his aim to reach; he clenched his teeth; with his left heel slightly raised, and his eyes fixed determinedly on the white object before him, he elevated his club—up, and up, and up—until from well behind his back it came forward and down again with a most mighty 'swipe.' There was a whistle of cleft air; the councillor spun round on his left foot, so prodigious had been the force of the stroke; and when everybody's gaze had returned from asking what had happened, it was startlingly evident that the ball still remained on the tee. Peter broke into a laugh. It was a hearty laugh—not like the ironical grin that appeared on the features of the station-master.

"Dod," said he, in humorous self-disparagement, "that's a fine one! That's well done! That's a good beginning! But better late luck than no luck——"

"Man, Peter," said his opponent, "were ye for driving the ball to Banavie?"

"Keep your breath to cool your own parritch," retorted McFadyen, confidently. "I'm no done with you yet, Jamie. The game's young."

For he was again addressing himself to the ball. And this time he did manage to hit it, and that with savage energy; but somehow something went wrong; it flew off at an oblique angle, it rose unnecessarily high, and almost immediately dropped at the foot of the meadow, where there was a ditch covered over with whins and withered flag and fern.

"Ye're in a mess this time, Peter," observed the station-master, grimly, as he proceeded to make a tee for himself.

But Peter had too much dignity, and was too anxious to stand well in the eyes of the fair, to betray resentment or exasperation.

"This driver's fit for nothing," said he, regarding the club with great disfavour. "It's forever heeling or toeing. The only tool that's fit to drive with is a bulger: catch me coming out with anything else again! Well, let's see what you can do, Jamie."

For Gilmour was now about to play his first stroke. And when he did so the ball flew away with a fine metallic 'pirr' that sounded pleasantly to all ears but Peter's, it skimmed the wide meadow, slightly rising before the end of its flight, it got clear over a dangerous hazard formed by a burn banked with whins, and on falling it was conspicuous on the face of the declivity beyond. This patent success of his enemy was even more trying to the councillor's temper than anything that had happened before. But he bore up well. He said not a word. And it was with a certain air of calm composure that he walked away towards the ditch to look for his ball, his companions following.

When they came up there was a different story to tell. The councillor could not find the ball, nor was it likely he should ever find it, amid this waste of withered herbage and pools of stagnant water; yet nevertheless he was hunting and probing hither and thither, and viciously hacking at the whins with his iron cleek, whilst the anger at his heart was now becoming outwardly visible.

"Do not mind it, Mr. McFadyen," said the sympathetic

Mrs. Gilmour. "Take another ball and go on from where you are."

But Peter, speechless with vexation, would continue his probing and hacking.

"Three minutes gone out of the five," said the station-master, playfully, holding his watch in his hand.

"James!" remonstrated his wife, in indignant tones. "Ye would not claim any such thing! Mr. McFadyen must take another ball, and go on from where he is."

"And who in all creation ever heard of women laying down the law on a golf-links?" cried the ungallant Gilmour; and then he added, with a cruel smile: "Four minutes gone, Peter."

And at last the embittered councillor had to abandon the unavailing search.

"The first hole is yours, Gilmour," he said, gloomily. "But the first hole is not the game, I would have ye remember that."

"Well I am aware of it," said the station-master, blithely. "And you know what they say: A good ending is better than a bad beginning."

And indeed fortune was not disposed to keep up a perpetual quarrel with the councillor; it would hardly have been fair, considering who were looking on, and considering his eager desire to shine. At the very outset of their progress to the next hole the station-master got into trouble; the drive which he led off was a good drive in every respect except direction; at the end of its flight the ball disappeared over a stone wall and had no doubt dropped into the farm-road on the other side. This raised Mr. McFadyen's spirits not a little. When he came to play, he paid scrupulous attention to his tee; he placed the ball most carefully; he paused for a second or two to make sure of the lie of the land; and when he struck it was with all the swing and freedom and art he could command. Away went the small white globe, in a gradually rising curve; they watched and watched it; they watched and watched it—against the softly grey sky; and when at length it subsided, at a great distance off, and out in the open, joy returned to the councillor's heart once more.

"Well done!" said Jess, quite honestly.

"Well done indeed!" cried Mrs. Gilmour.

And even Barbara, who had been gazing away towards the Sound of Mull, turned to see what was going on.

"It's a little better—a little better," said Mr. McFadyen, with a fine indifference. "One cannot always be playing like a born idiot. Now let's go and see what Gilmour is about."

By this time the station-master had clambered over the dyke, and had succeeded in finding his ball, which lay in a deep rut in the road. And now the secret exultation of the councillor could hardly be any longer suppressed. He called up the women-folk to look over the wall at Gilmour's most miserable plight. For truly the station-master was in ill-luck. Twice he got the ball well out of the rut, and twice it struck the top of the wall, falling back into the road again. Peter laughed loud and long over this amusing spectacle.

"Hit him again, Jimmie!" he cried. "Dod, it's grand exercise for ye! But keep your temper!—Keep your temper now!—I've seen more than one club bashed in that road."

Eventually the station-master got out of all his difficulties; but they had sadly handicapped him; and when at length he and the councillor had reached the green, there could be little doubt about the result; the proud and pleased Peter won this hole easily.

And so, with varying success and mishap they made their way along and across these rude and untutored links, until they were nearing the dreaded Pinnacle.

"Wait till ye see Gilmour at the Pinnacle," Peter had said, with a sly wink, to Jess Maclean. "Jamie's temper can stand anything and everything—except the Pinnacle."

They were now come to a rising slope beyond which was an unseen hollow, while beyond the hollow again rose a considerable height the steep face of which was scarred across by little ridges, of a muddy and sloppy nature. The temptation here placed before the ingenuous player is to try to get over this desperate hazard by one daring drive from the tee—the common result of which is that he lands in the intervening valley, or strikes the impossible face of the hill, a still more hopeless fate; while the cunning practitioner, playing a half-stroke from the tee, is content to reach the top of the hither slope, from which he has a

better chance of sending his ball right on to the summit of the Pinnacle. It was with a subdued smile that Peter watched the station-master make his preparations.

"Now for a good one, Jamie," said he, with diabolical guile. "The Pinnacle's always making a fool of ye ! Let's see what you can do now !"

But, whether by accident or design the station-master made no sort of display ; his ball landed at the top of the near slope, lying well for the next drive, and considerably dashing the councillor's baleful anticipations. Peter now played, getting to about the same place. Then came Gilmour's opportunity ; and with a very excellent 'swipe,' that earned the generous applause of the spectators, he sent his ball sailing away over that ugly chasm until it dropped on the opposite crest : at last he had conquered the Pinnacle !

Now of course Peter could do no better, but at least he might do as well ; and so, with anxious heart but resolute mien, he made ready. He looked at the horrid cliff, with its steps and stairs of sloppy herbage ; he looked at the tiny white globe before him ; he pursed up his lips firmly—he raised his club—he struck a manful stroke. Alas ! that such things should be—the ball did indeed clear the chasm, but all too unmistakably did it alight on the opposite face ; it hesitated for a moment ; then the white spot was seen to come hopping slowly and quietly into the valley below. It was now the station-master's turn to jeer ; and jeer he did—in such a fashion that his wife had angrily and shamefacedly to protest.

What followed is almost too painful for narration ; except in this way, that the spectacle of a man wrestling with his agony has always been understood to arouse woman's sympathy ; and Jess Maclean was looking on. No matter how the councillor fought and strove, changing the trusted niblick for the crafty sand-iron, or entrusting his fortunes to the useful cleck, that small white sphere, with a remorseless and malignant pertinacity, would return from the greatest height he could reach, sliding, hopping, rolling, until it lay contentedly in front of him.

"Put it in your pocket, Peter—put the ball in your pocket, man !" the station-master shouted from the top of

the Pinnacle—mercilessly returning the taunts that had so often been addressed to himself.

And this, after a few more frantic trials, Peter was constrained to do, for by this time the evening was wearing on ; but all the same he was determined to conceal his bitter mortification ; Jess must see that in the most tragic circumstances he could preserve his equanimity.

“ Jamie,” he called, “ come away down out o’ that, man : it’s time to be making for home. The afternoon’s yours ; we’ll live to fight another day.”

So the Homeric contest was ended, and the shades of evening fell ; but the overhead sky was clearing, as they made their way to the sea shore ; and by the time they entered the woods skirting the coast there was some suggestion of moonlight wandering down through the black stems, and causing a shadow here and there on the ancient-worn pathway. When they got into the open again, the moon was found to be high in the south-east, with a halo of pale lemon hue around it ; there were a few solitary clouds hanging high that still had a lingering touch of saffron about them ; the waters down the Sound of Kerrara were of a cold metallic grey. The councillor was in great form. This was quite a picturesque and romantic ending to their afternoon’s diversion. In the woods he had lifted up his voice and sang ; and now, fronting the open bay, he sang ; and the burden of his song, shrill as it might be, was the praise of young Jessie the Flower of Dunblane. He might just as well have said Duntroone : they all knew.

*‘ Is lovely young Jessie,
Is lovely young Jessie,
Is lovely young Jessie, the Flower of Dunblane.’*

—thus he skirled away, with many gay flourishes, until they were nearing the town, when decorum demanded silence.

And of course the first thing they did, when they got into Campbell Street, was to go and report themselves to the widow ; and the first person they saw—or at least the most conspicuous—when they entered the little parlour, was Jack Ogilvie, the purser of the *Aros Castle*. Barbara seemed to waken out of a dream.

CHAPTER XX.

AN INTRUDER.

"AND how are you yourself, Mr. McFadyen?" said Ogilvie, when he had paid his respects to the two girls, and resumed his seat. "I'm glad to see by the newspaper that you can hold your own at the Council—that you're not afraid even of the Provost himself."

Now there was a kind of gay assurance—a happy-go-lucky fashion of making himself at home—about the young man that the councillor keenly resented; but at the same time this compliment to his courage in debate somewhat mollified Peter.

"I'll not deny," said he, sententiously, "that there are occasions when it is one's duty to stand by one's opinions, even at the risk of being considered quarrelsome. When a man has convictions he must maintain them. And I have never budged from my position that, with regard to the water-supply, Loch-a-Voulin is the only and proper loch——"

"What is this your Gaelic Choir are after?" Jack Ogilvie asked, turning lightly to Jess Maclean.

"I have not heard of anything, then," she answered.

"Oh, they are meditating great doings," said he. "It appears that a number of members of the Glasgow Choir are coming through; and your Choir want to entertain them—a concert and ball, or something of the sort; and they have already asked me to act as M.C. Well, I was not quite sure to say yes or no, when I remembered that Miss Barbara had promised me a dance on the first opportunity of the kind, and of course that decided me."

Instantly all eyes were turned to Barbara, with surprised inquiry. Where had Barbara learnt to dance? And how could this conversation between her and the Purser have taken place? The girl herself, showing the greatest distress and confusion, was silent.

"Ay, and where did you find a dancing master at Knoekalanish?" asked Mrs. Maclean, smiling good-naturedly enough.

But Barbara seemed to consider the question a taunt.

"There's plenty on the island can dance very well," said she, "and the one can show the other."

So the mystery remained a mystery; for Jack Ogilvie, perceiving that his chance remark had caused some trouble, immediately came to the rescue and turned the conversation into another channel. Moreover, he could talk well. Before securing his present employment, he had made many voyages, and seen many places and things; he had an abundance of amusing experiences; he was accustomed, because of his good looks and his pleasant manners, to be made much of; and he chatted away—to Mrs. Maclean, to Jess, to Barbara—freely and cheerfully, and as one who knew he was welcome. All this but increased the councillor's profound chagrin. What right had this intruder to come into the sacred circle? There was an air of audacious youth about him that was in itself offensive. Then Mr. McFadyen, who was accustomed to boast of his knowledge of the world, found himself driven into a narrow and cramped little provincial corner by this gay conversationalist who had been everywhere and had seen everything. What was the use of vaunting Ben Nevis and Ben Cruachan before one who had beheld the pale snows of Mount Etna towering above the burnt and torrid slopes of Sicily? What was the use of talking about the Government gunboat just come into the bay to one who had watched a Mediterranean squadron steam into the Piræus? The hilly semicircle of Duntroone looked well enough as one came sailing into the harbour; but perhaps it was hardly so impressive as the domes and minarets and gardens of Stamboul seen from across the waters of the Golden Horn. And, though Mr. Boyd's cairngorms were no doubt very fine, and his settings of lona stones ingenious and intricate, they could not well be compared with the treasures of the museums which this young man had carelessly visited in his various wanderings. And the worst of it was that he had no swagger about him. He had no need of swagger; he was too handsome, too good-humoured, too used to favouring glances and smiles.

And alas ! he was dowered with the terrible dower of youth, that is so merciless in its victories.

But if the councillor fretted and fumed in his provincial corner, that was not the mood in which Barbara Maclean, who had entirely recovered from her momentary confusion, sat and listened to all this easy, brilliant, discursive talk. Never before had she had such an opportunity of studying Ogilvie's appearance, of observing all those elegancies and refinements and perfections that in her eyes appeared to separate him from the rest of mankind. New fascinations, new attractions, were every moment being revealed to her. For example, his hair, that was of a light golden-brown, with something more than a tendency to curl, was cut particularly short about the nape of the neck ; but, short as it was, there was no suggestion of stubble ; on the contrary it lay about in little silken waves on the fair and sun-tanned skin. His laugh, too, was honest and unaffected ; it seemed to be the expression of a naturally happy temperament ; life appeared to go well with him. And of course Jack Ogilvie, whatever he might be talking or laughing about, could not but be conscious of the presence of an extremely pretty girl, who, besides, paid him rapt attention ; and if he did not exactly lay himself out to capitulate, at least he had no thought of hiding his light under a bushel. The councillor, disappointed and angry, had relapsed into a sullen silence.

But Mr. McFadyen had his innings when the dazzling sun-god had departed.

"There is nothing I despise so much," he declared with emphasis, "as a flippant young man. For where there is flippancy there is no depth ; and where there is no depth there is no stabeelity, and where there is no stabeelity, there can be nothing to look forward to but the downward road to wreck and ruin. The creature of a summer day—a fluff of a candle—a butterfly blown by the wind ! I appeal to you, Mrs. Maclean," he went on earnestly. "What would happen to us if we took no heed of the serious interests of life ? Look at the questions that press close on us—look at the water-supply—look at vaccination—look at the housing of the poor : did ye see the last report ?—the terribly overcrowding——"

"Indeed I did," said the little widow. "And I was just shocked to see the rate of infant immortality—it's fearful to think of——"

"Did not I say so—did not I say so?" he exclaimed—as though he had discovered some dark connection between Jack Ogilvie and that Herodian slaughter. "If we do not face the problems of existence, we perish; it's the one thing or the other; gallivanting about like a butterfly will not do. The world's not made up of idleness and amusement——"

At this point Mr. McFadyen stopped. It may have occurred to him that he was entirely on the wrong tack. For had he not consistently been, especially before these young folk, the foremost champion of all sorts of gaieties and sports and pastimes, and anxious to display his own proficiency therein? These gloomy preachments did not become one who excelled in the graceful Varsoviana, who sang "When other lips" with touching pathos, who could throw the hammer against any of the younger men, or drive a ball from the Pinnacle right on to the next green. Happily, at this moment, Barbara stepped in to afford him the means of retrieving his error.

"If the Gaelic Choir are to have dancing," said she, "will it be in the Drill Hall?"

"Ah, there now," rejoined the councillor, with some return to his ordinary buoyancy; "there, now, will be a fine evening; and no doubt it will be in the Drill Hall; and I should not wonder if the Glasgow Choir gave us some part-singing before the dance. Of course, it may be presumptuous in me to assume that I am to be invited——"

"They could not do without ye, Mr. McFadyen!" cried the widow.

"But if all goes well," continued the councillor, modestly, "I hope to have Miss Jessie and her cousin under my escort, just as we were before."

"And this time," said Barbara, glancing somewhat nervously from the one to the other, "this time will we wait a little while for the dancing?"

"Oh, yes, if you would like," the widow responded, with her usual magnanimity. "I will trust to Mr. McFadyen to look after you both and bring you safe home."—Almost

immediately thereafter, with some trifling excuse, Barbara left those others to themselves ; she crossed the street, went up the stair, and entered the house ; and there she made straight for her own room, and for the two drawers in which lay the odds and ends of millinery she had managed to acquire since the occasion of Mrs. McAskill's ball.

Apparently the handsome young Purser had found the hour or so he had passed in Mrs. Maclean's parlour pleasant enough ; for he got into the way of looking in of an evening, especially when he had any intelligence to convey about the visit of the Glasgow Choir ; while Barbara, under pretext that she wished to learn how to become useful in the shop, went regularly over at the close of each day, whoever might chance to call. On the other hand, Allan Henderson was conspicuously absent ; he was busy about the starting of his Latin Class ; and he was keen to have all things well in train before bringing his budget of news to this little circle of friends. Perhaps, if success were assured, or even seen to be probable, Barbara might be attracted ? Hitherto she had shown the scantiest interest in his doings ; but perchance these larger schemes might win her attention ? And she knew what was spurring him on—she knew what hopes he had formed : it might be that this future to which he was looking she would recognise as also her own.

At length one evening the schoolmaster, his brain a chaos of wild anticipations, went along to the tobacconist's shop, and entered, and tapped at the partly-opened door of the parlour.

"Come in, Allan," the widow called at once.

But already he had perceived that a stranger was there—a stranger in one sense, though of course every one in Duntroone knew by sight the Purser of the *Aros Castle*.

"Where have you been all this while ?" continued Mrs. Maclean, cheerfully, "We were thinking of sending round the bellman to find you out. And surely you know Mr. Ogilvie ?"

The two young men nodded—the one lightly and carelessly, the other stiffly enough.

"And is the rain off yet ?" she asked again—for there was an awkward pause.

Allan made some kind of answer. Already his mind was

filled with vague misgivings. This stranger appeared to be but little of a stranger ; he seemed to be on the most friendly and familiar terms with everybody ; he had installed himself and made himself at home in a surprisingly short time. And what now happened, simple as the incident was, only served to increase the schoolmaster's nebulous apprehensions.

"Oh, was it raining when you came in ?" Barbara said, in a very amiable way, to Ogilvie. Therewith she crossed over to the peg on which he had hung his cap, and she took down the cap and examined it. "Yes, indeed," said she, "And how careless you are !" With that she went and got a cloth ; she brought the cap along to the gasalier ; and very carefully she polished the two brass buttons and the narrow band of glazed leather. It was a good natured little action, perhaps of no import ; but in the eyes of Allan Henderson this betrayal of sympathetic interest, on the part of one ordinarily so reserved and indifferent, was of startling significance. As for Ogilvie, he only laughed.

"In my trade," said he, "we don't mind a few drops of water, whether salt or fresh."

"But when you are on shore, you should do as shore-folk do," she said ; and thereupon she went and returned the cap to its peg. Henderson remembered afterwards that he had never seen her figure look so bewitchingly graceful as when she was holding the brass buttons up to the gaslight, the better to polish them and the glazed leather band.

No, it was not Jack Ogilvie, purser of the *Aros Castle*, who was the stranger ; it was he, Allan Henderson, who found himself, or imagined himself to be, a stranger. He felt himself isolated and companionless ; his poor little budget of news, so all-important to himself, neither asked for nor thought of ; all the talk was of the festivities in connection with the forthcoming visit of the Glasgow Choir. Jess, it is true, would occasionally try to say a word or two to him, or would proffer him the matches, or the like ; but he was proud and hurt ; it was in stern silence that he listened to all this babblement about dancing and partners and dress. Strangest thing of all, it was Barbara—Barbara the apathetic and morose—who was now most animated ;

her liquid dark-blue eyes were full of life, her parted lips smiling, a pleased and eager interest giving a fresh bloom to her complexion.

"I am sure the waltz country-dance is as pretty as any," she was saying.

"Yes, when you have plenty of good waltzers," Ogilvie interposed, with a laugh.

"And the figure is so simple," she continued, addressing him alone, "there is no difficulty in trying to remember. But the figures of the quadrille—and worse still, the figures of the Lancers—well, who can remember them?"

"Who?" he repeated gaily. "Why, your partner, to be sure! That's his business. You should be taken through a quadrille without a moment's trouble; it's for your partner to tell you what is coming next. That is the good fortune of being a young lady—everything is done for you—you have no bother. But I'm afraid that what is considered the best use of a dance in the great houses in London would not be practicable at the Drill Hall. A couple of partners wouldn't find it easy to 'sit out,' and have a confidential chat by themselves—unless they went down the steps into the lane, and that would be awkward, among the mud, with perhaps an arriving carriage or two——"

"But surely Mr. McFadyen will see that everything is done in a proper way," observed Mrs. Maclean, not quite understanding the point. "It would be a great pity if the young people were not allowed to enjoy themselves—it's not so many chances they have in the course of a year."

"Oh, yes, you may trust the councillor," said Ogilvie, lightly. "All the financial questions have been confided to him; and the refreshment department as well; though there will be nothing so grand as what the McAskills gave, for a hotel-keeper has a lot of servants, and knows how to do things."

"I am sure no one will be busier than yourself, Mr. Ogilvie," said Barbara, with approving eyes. "For I remember at the other dance you were looking after every one——"

"Busy?" said he. "But not too busy to remember promises; and you've promised me a dance, Miss Barbara; and maybe we'll make it into two or three. McFadyen is a

desperate man for the dancing ; he'll be glad enough to stay on ; and you hurried away far too soon last time. This time we must treat you better ; and you'll not be flying off just when the fun is going to begin."

"And you, now, Allan, my lad," put in the widow, with the most kindly intention, "are you not thinking of going with them ? The life of a young man should not be altogether made up of books and classes."

The black look on Allan's face was blended now with an active displeasure.

"No, no," said he, impatiently. "Let them that can enjoy such amusements do so, and welcome : there's no blame to them. But other folks have other ways—that is all."

And thereupon he rose from his seat, to take his leave. The widow urged him to remain, but he refused, with stiff courtesy. Jess alone followed him into the front shop.

"What is it that has vexed you, Allan ?" she asked, with direct frankness.

"There are some things in human nature that I do not understand yet," he replied, and that dark and absent look on his face was as sombre as ever. "And perhaps I shall never be able to understand them. Good night, Jessie !"

He held out his hand for a moment, and she pressed it. As he left, her gentle grey eyes followed him, and there was more than sympathetic concern in them. She did not at once return to the parlour.

Outside the rain was still falling heavily, and there was a cold wind blowing in from the sea. The schoolmaster was grateful for this stinging wet that struck about his ears ; it seemed to bewilder him in some kind of way, and to repress and chill down the hot turmoil of his brain.

CHAPTER XXI.

A RAID ON THE SANCTUARY.

A BROODING twilight lay over the hills and the lonely corries as two men—the one of them being Lauchlan the shoemaker, the other his cousin Colin, a keeper from Loch-Awe side—made their way along the shores of a solitary and voiceless sea-loch. The keeper was a short person, of extraordinary breadth of shoulder and muscular development about the legs; he looked indeed like a compressed giant; and he walked with the long swinging stride of one used to the heather. Both men spoke in undertones, though that seemed unnecessary enough in this silent and trackless solitude.

“It is I,” said Lauchlan, gloomily, in Gaelic, “that am not liking this affair.”

“With your leave, then,” rejoined his companion, in the same tongue, “you are a fool. Why, the doings of this night will be talked of throughout the West Highlands for years and years to come! And you yourself, Lauchlan,” he went on, with a grim jocosity, “you yourself will be made famous, if names should leak out. As Lauchlan the shoemaker, you could never become famous; but as one that helped to drive the deer out of the Creannoch sanctuary, you will become famous. The poets will sing of you, Lauchlan——”

Lauchlan was peevish. He expressed an opinion about poets in general, and a wish as to their future fate, that betrayed his ill-temper.

“There was one of them,” he continued, “living in Duntroone; and for two years I was mending boots and shoes for him; and he went away; and never a penny of his money was I seeing before or since. And if any names leak out, as you say, it will more likely put us into jail than anything else. That will be a fine thing, to be in jail!” He turned his head, as if suddenly remembering. “Is there a drop in the bottle, Colin?”

“Indeed there is,” said the keeper, pausing for a moment. “But there’s more than a drop or two drops where we are going. Oh, I tell you, Lord Esme is the boy! He is the boy! If there’s any devilment in the country, he must be at it; and fearing for nothing; the lion’s heart the young man has got, and no mistake. Was I telling you what happened last year on the Strin, when the water was too low for the fishing?” continued the keeper, as they resumed their progress. “Well, now, if there’s any kind of poaching that is not known to Lord Esme Carruthers, then I am not aware of it. And a fine trick he has, if the pools are low, and the salmon are hiding, and you cannot see them so as to drop the snatching-hooks over them; for he will bring a spaniel with him, and he will put the spaniel into the water, and fling stones here and there, with the spaniel swimming after them, and crossing every inch of the pool; and do you not think a salmon will imagine it is the devil overhead when he sees the four paws of a spaniel going like the paddles of a steamer?—he will be very glad to make a move of it——”

“I will take a little drop more, Colin; I am not used to such long travelling as you.”

Again they halted, and again they resumed—each contentedly wiping his mouth with his coat-sleeve.

“Very well, then; at the time I am telling you of, we managed at length to get sight of a salmon, and Lord Esme he put the line over him, and struck, and sure enough we had him fast. ‘Here, Colin,’ says his lordship, ‘you play this fish, and I’ll gaff him for you;’ for he never cares about playing a fish, whether he has hooked him by fair means or any means. Then he takes the gaff down to the water’s edge; and I was standing over him—with no great strain on the fish either; when, by the holy piper, away comes the line into the air; and the first thing I saw was that the triangle had struck his lordship in the face. And maybe you do not know what a triangle is, Lauchlan, but it is three hooks, each as long as your finger, and they are bound back to back with a band of iron; and what do you think now—one of the hooks had gone right into Lord Esme’s cheek. If it had been an ordinary salmon-fly, I could have stripped the dressing off, and pushed the barb

through, and got the hook out that way ; but, bless, me, there were the other two hooks, and I could not break them off, or do anything with them. ‘Your lordship,’ says I, ‘you will have to go into Inverness, to get a doctor to cut it out.’ ‘You scoundrel,’ says he—but speaking was not easy for him, the poor young man—‘do you want me to advertise myself as a poacher all over the country, and me known to every station-master on the Highland Line ? Take your knife in your hand now, and dig this thing out !’ And with that he lay down, and put his head on the heather. Lauchlan, my son, it was a terrible job. More than once have I had to cut a hook out of my own finger ; but it was nothing at all to that job. And did he utter a word or a groan all the time ?—not one !—not a movement of a muscle—and my handkerchief and his handkerchief smothered. And, do you know what he says when he is on his feet again, and I have the triangle out : ‘Well, Colin,’ he says, and he was laughing, ‘I do not think it is on this side of my head I will sleep to-night !’ Was not that a hero now ? I tell you, Lord Esme is the boy !—he’s the boy for any devilment that’s going !”

“Ay, and are you sure he will be here this night ?” asked Lauchie—whose undertones had sunk almost to a whisper, for the darkness was coming on, and they were in a lonely neighbourhood.

“Sure I am of that,” his friend answered, “if Niall Gorach can find out the Black Bothy in Glen Etherick ; and there are few things about this district unknown to the half-witted lad. ‘Colin, my old friend,’ says his lordship to me—and if there’s anyone can speak better Gaelic than Lord Esme, I am not acquainted with him—‘Colin,’ says he, ‘maybe that is a foolish tale of Niall Gorach about the white stag in Creannoeh ; but anyway you must get a few of your friends that you can trust, and we will go into the Forest, and we will drive out every living head of deer that’s in the sanctuary, and scatter them far and wide ; and if there is any white stag there, he will soon be seen wandering about by somebody.’”

“Ay—when we are in jail,” murmured Lauchie, in sombre tones.

“I do not care,” said the telescoped giant, defiantly.

"If his lordship came to me, and said, 'Colin, we will go now and knock at the door of the Bad Place, and see what they will do to us,' it's I that would be answering him, 'Very well, your lordship: where you go I will be at your side.' And maybe they would be quite civil to him after all; for there's no one can withstand Lord Esme when he wishes to be merry and friendly—every one knows that."

By this time they had got well away from the sea-loch, and were gradually ascending into a wild upland region that looked dreary enough in the gathering dark. An absolute silence prevailed in these mountain solitudes, save for the trickling of some unseen burn; and Lauchlan, laboriously toiling after his guide, was not disposed to waste his breath in speech. But at last he said discontentedly—

"Was there no easier way of getting to Glen Etherick than this way?"

"There are many ways of getting to Glen Etherick, as is well known," responded Colin, with quiet dignity. "But when you will be planning an expedition of this kind, it must be done with judgment; and if all of us had gone together to the Black Bothy*, do you not think that every keeper within ten miles of the Creannoch Forest would have become aware of it? No, no, Lauchlan, my son; that is not the way we manage; for one will come from here, and another from there; and the Black Bothy has been chosen as a trysting-place so that a small keg or two of whisky could be sent on beforehand. For I tell you that Lord Esme is the boy; ay, that indeed; and anyone that does him a service—well, he will not die of thirst."

"It is I that am wishing we were there," responded Lauchie, with a heartfelt sigh, as he plunged and stumbled and fought his way along through rocks and heather.

After protracted and weary toil they at length began to descend from these solitary heights, eventually getting into a deep and narrow ravine the sides of which were lined with birch trees that made their progress more and more difficult. And the darkness had grown profound.

"I am thinking this is the right corrie," said the keeper, "but I am not sure. And maybe we will have to wait till the moon rises——"

* Black Bothy—an illicit still.

At this moment he uttered a brief exclamation, and involuntarily stopped short. For a human figure had suddenly become visible, peering from among the birch trees. Then he recognised who this was.

"Son of the devil," he growled angrily, "what do you mean by haunting the woods like a wild-cat? Well, where is the Black Bothy, then?"

"It is lower down," answered Niall Gorach; but he did not wait for any more questions; he vanished into the gloom again, not even the crackling of a twig betraying his whereabouts.

However, even without Niall Gorach's guidance, the keeper and his companion experienced but little trouble in discovering the appointed rendezvous; for when they had still further descended the chasm, a muffled sound of voices proved to be a sufficient clue; and after crossing the waters of a small stream, they made their way to the entrance of the dismantled still. Indeed the half-dozen or so of shepherds, gillies, and the like who had taken possession of the Bothy did not appear to have aimed at much concealment; they had lit a fire of chips and branches in the middle of the floor; two or three candles, stuck in black bottles, also helped to light up the spacious cavern; while the hilarious talking and laughing going on was quite unrestrained. Beyond the red glare of the fire, and seated on a log of wood, was a young man who was clearly king of the company: a handsome young fellow, with a devil-may-care air about him, and a merry twinkle in his eye. He alone of the group had neither cup nor glass by him; he hardly even cared to keep his pipe alit, as he listened, with evident diversion, to the clamorous argument going forward, in which gibes and jests and sarcasms were being freely exchanged.

"Welcome to the hearth!" he called out, in excellent Gaelic, when he caught a glimpse of the two dusky figures at the door. "Come away in, Colin, and you Lauchlan; and make yourselves at home; for we will not start till the moon is up. And pass the keg now, lads; Colin, a seat on the floor is better than no seat; and when you have been in the night air, John Barleycorn is a good friend."

"I am drinking," rejoined the keeper, slowly and

formally, as he filled his leathern cup, "I am drinking to your lordship, and to the finding of the white stag."

The young man burst out laughing.

"We will say nothing about the white stag," said he, "for fear the half-witted lad may have been making fools of us. But this I know that it will be a fine thing to send the Creannoch deer on their travels. People who go on their travels see many wonders; and it is not good to have either deer or men shut up in a sanctuary; we will give the Creannoch stags an opportunity of beholding the world. But in the meantime, lads of my heart, send round that keg; and I will give you another toast now—'The land of hills and glens and heroes!'"

He himself did not drink; but the others did, with a will; they were all talking vociferously, and laughing, and arguing; they had been well primed for this enterprise.

"And now for a song!" his young lordship called aloud, to still the tumult. "The sons of the Gael must have their bard with them. Who is it, Colin—is it your friend of the shoes?"

"Yes, yes, indeed!" they all of them cried—rejoiced to find a scape goat.

And Lauchlan, staring with bemused eyes into the red-flickering flames, had no thought of declining the honour. As soon as he comprehended that a song was required of him, he began. It was a mournful song; and in slow and melancholy tones he sang—his gaze absently fixed on the glowing embers—

'The wind is fair, the day is fine,
Swiftly, swiftly runs the time;
The boat is floating on the tide
That wafts me off from Fiunary.'

Then all of them caught at the chorus—for there is no strain in all the West Highlands so well-known as the Farewell to Fiunary—

*'Eirich agus tiugainn O,
Eirich agus tiugainn O,
Eirich agus tiugainn O,
Mo shoraidh slan le Fionn-Airidh!'*

Lauchlan was near crying through this universal sympathy;

and it was with a still more plaintive pathos that he proceeded—

‘A thousand thousand tender ties
Accept this day my plaintive sighs;
My heart within me almost dies
At thought of leaving Fiunary.’

And again the hoarse wail of the chorus rewarded him—

‘*Eirich agus tiugainn O,
Eirich agus tiugainn O,
Eirich agus tiugainn O.
Mo shoraidh slan le Fionn-Airidh !*’

But there was a young gillie present, who was either drunk, or envious, or jocular, or perhaps all three combined, for he interposed spitefully—

“That is very well sung for a wintering sheep.”

Now, Lauchlan MacIntyre, as everyone knew, was a native of Lismore ; and Lismore is an island to which sheep from the higher districts are sent for the winter ; and, for some occult reason or another, the most deadly insult that can be paid to a Lismore man is to say, “Meh-h-h” to him, or to ask him the question, “How are you now, you wintering sheep ?” In the present case, when it dawned upon Lauchie’s understanding that this atrocious epithet had been bestowed on him, he ceased his song. He regarded the facetious young gillie. He looked around. There was no weapon of any kind at hand. But with a sudden inspiration he whipped off one of his heavy-nailed shoes ; he poised it only for an instant ; he hurled it across the fire at the face of his enemy. Nor had the jocose young gillie been expecting any such attack ; he had no time to ward off the blow ; his nose received the missile ; and before he could stagger up to his feet he was a sad spectacle. And in fact he was not allowed to get to his feet ; they pinned him down ; and by the time they had threatened, and expostulated, and curbed the raging wild beast within him, the signal had come for them to start, Niall Gorach having appeared at the Bothy, with the announcement that the moon was over the hill.

And very soon, after leaving the secret haunt that the gaugers had discovered and harried, they entered upon a

much more desolate country than any they had come through. A ghostly country, moreover ; for now the moon was up ; and a pale and spectral light shone along the treeless wastes and showed peak after peak of mountains receding into the wan and cloudless skies. Of course there were shadowy hollows here and there ; and it was along by them, for the most part, that they stealthily made their way ; but on the whole their progress was steadily upwards, into far-reaching and sterile altitudes that were plunged in profoundest silence.

"Now, you will remember, Lauchie," said Colin the keeper—whose gait was a little uncertain, though he managed to get over the ground—"you will remember, when you are left by yourself, not to be too eager. It will be enough if the deer get our wind ; and maybe they will pass out by his lordship—though I am not believing much in the white stag ; anyway the driving of the Sanctuary will be a noble frolic——"

"Aw, Dycea," said Lauchie, who was giggling and chuckling to himself, "the Rechabites are the clever boys ; but the Rechabites have many things to learn ; it is little they know of a sport like this. There is no sport in the drinking of water ; and that is the truth I am telling you, Colin, my hero. What is the use of water—and be —— to it ! Lord Esme is the lad ! Colin, lend me your cup."

For on leaving the Bothy the black bottles that had served as candle-sticks had been filled from the kegs ; and Lauchie had become possessed of one of them ; so that he was now enabled to give his friend and companion a stalwart dram. In return Colin would have repeated his instructions about the driving of the Sanctuary ; but his speech was rather thick and involved ; while Lauchlan was far too happy to pay any heed to him. Lauchlan was singing little songs to himself ; and laughing ; and making merry at the expense of the Rechabites. He had no quarrel with any deer ; he had no concern about any white stag ; the two moons that lit up this ghostly world shed a gentle and friendly radiance around ; and the black bottle sticking out of his breast pocket comforted his heart with pleasurable anticipations.

"Aw, Dycea, the Rechabites are the clever boys," he

kept repeating to himself, with unholy glee, "and it is I that would like to see the whole of the Tent No. 3182 here at this moment, and every man of them with a black bottle in his hand. That would be a new kind of dance for them—the clever boys that they are!"

By this time the marauders were well within the Creannoch Forest, and approaching the Sanctuary—a vast hollow formed by the concave sides of two adjoining mountains; and it was at this point that the straggling little band began to separate. Here, also, Long Lauchie received his orders. He was not to stir from his post for at least an hour; then he was to go gently and slowly in the direction of the Sanctuary, down wind. There was to be no calling or signalling of any kind; indeed, the probability was that he would not again see any of his companions until he might chance to meet them in Duntroone. His own way back thither was left to his own discretion.

And so Lauchlan sate down on the heather, and let the others go; and ere long he was quite alone in this phantom world of rock and peak and grey moonlight. He did not listen anxiously for the swift patter of hoofs, nor watch for the startled upraising of an antlered head; he was content with himself and his own company; he was carefully nursing the black bottle; he was crooning to himself the *Leis an Lurgainn*—

*'Islay looming, o lee,
In the gloaming, o ho,
Our ship's compass set we,
And our lights we did show;'*

the two or three moons over there in the south, as they looked down upon him, were of a friendly aspect; and his heart, jogging on warmly and equably, was at peace with all mankind.

* * * * *

When Lauchlan MacIntyre awoke, the dawn was declaring itself, and he looked around with dazed eyes wondering. For this world in which he found himself was in no wise or seeming the world with which he was familiar; he recognised no feature of it, nor the conditions of it. Had he been translated, then? Was this the new heaven and the new earth of which he had vaguely heard in slumberous

discourses? But there was no living creature visible; there was the strangest silence; and a thin rain, almost imperceptible in its fineness, had become glorified by the early sunlight, and hung between him and the east as if it were some magic silver veil, hiding him from the knowledge of mortals. And there were other perplexing things. If he had been spirited away into fairy-land, what had become of his shoe? One foot had shoe and stocking; the other its stocking only; and a continuous hot throb seemed to say that in his unknown passage from the inhabited regions of the universe his toes must seriously have encountered stones. And the black bottle—alas! it was empty—the black bottle appeared to be connected with transactions which he could not in the least remember. Then he looked round once more—this poor orphan unit of humanity transferred to an inhospitable sphere that did not even offer him a cup of water wherewith to slake his thirst. And then he put his head on the heather, and fell peacefully asleep again; the rain might rain as it liked.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN INFORMER.

THE rumour ran through Duntroone that some accident—some slight accident—had happened to the *Aros Castle*; certain it is that instead of continuing her voyage as usual, she had slowly steamed back, and was now lying alongside the quay. And Barbara, as soon as the mid-day meal was over, and herself more or less set at liberty, put on her things quickly and went out, no doubt wishing to hear the latest news.

But she had not gone a dozen yards when she saw in the distance none other than Jack Ogilvie himself; he was coming along in his usual leisurely fashion, smoking his pipe. She instantly paused. She glanced across towards the tobacconist's shop, to see if there was any one at the door. Then she retreated into the entry from which she

had just emerged ; and there she remained, hiding herself in the dusk, until she knew that Ogilvie must have passed and be well on his way, wherever that might be leading him. And then she came out again ; and, with another nervous glance across the street, she proceeded to follow in the direction he had taken, and that with an idle and indifferent air, as though she were merely going for a haphazard stroll.

There was no need for her to quicken her pace ; she knew that any one leaving Duntroone by this road must necessarily return by it, the pathway round the shore being blocked ; and so she had ample time to arrange her cuffs and smooth her hair—and also to summon up some trifle of courage, in view of a possible meeting. Nevertheless when her anxious eyes discovered for her that Jack Ogilvie had taken advantage of a wayside seat to rest for a few seconds in order to fill his pipe, her heart began beating in a painful fashion, and once or twice she hesitated, as if afraid to go further. Then she went on more boldly, looking at the brushwood, and at the mossgrown wall, and at the deep hollow with its cottages and gardens, as if her attention were wholly occupied by these.

She drew near. He did not look up. She came abreast of him—irresolute—her eyes conscious of his every movement and attitude, yet pretending to be fixed far ahead. And then something—perhaps the passing of her skirts—attracted his notice ; there was an upward glance ; the next instant he was on his feet.

“Oh, how do you do, Miss Barbara ?” he said, in his ready and pleasant fashion.

Her face was afire as she timidly gave him her hand. If she had been sure that she could safely address him in Gaelic, perhaps she would have been less embarrassed.

“I hear there was an accident to the *Aros Castle*,” she managed to say, in her confusion ; “I hope there was no one hurt.”

“Oh, no ; not at all,” he answered her, lightly. “Very little of an accident—leaking steam-tubes, or something of that kind. But I may have a day or two’s holiday ; and, of course, getting so much of the salt water ordinarily, it is but natural I should turn landward when I have

an hour for a stroll. And which way were you going, Miss Barbara ? ” he continued, in the same free-and-easy manner. “ Towards Cowal, perhaps ? ”

“ Yes ; I was thinking—— ” she said ; and there she stopped. She seemed frightened ; for the next word on either side might involve a suggestion that they should walk on together. Her shyness and alarm were equally unperceived by the Purser.

“ Well, I had some half idea of going there myself,” he said, cheerfully. “ And two’s company, and one’s none—if you don’t mind.”

He appeared to take her acquiescence for granted ; for without more ado he placed himself by her side, and they proceeded on their way : she trembling, breathless, overjoyed, he rather glad that, as he was sauntering towards Cowal Ferry anyway, he had encountered a very pretty girl who could walk and chat with him.

And then, as in duty bound, he began to ask after the health of her aunt ; and he would most likely have spoken of Jess ; and perhaps expressed a hope that the tobacconist business continued to flourish ; but Barbara would have none of these petty and common-place details ; she hastily brushed them aside ; she wanted to know all about the forthcoming ball to be given to the Glasgow Gaelic Choir ; she asked him, rather nervously, how he proposed to secure any dances for himself, if he had to act as Master of the Ceremonies ; and then, with a certain coyness, she supposed that on so great an occasion he would have no time to come and speak to his friends. Well, if that was her cue, he was willing enough to respond ; it mattered little to him what the conversation was about. And thus it was that visions of festivities began to form themselves before Barbara’s eyes ; and there were melodious strains, and the continuous whisper of swift-gliding feet ; her brain became exalted with the excitement of brilliant lights and fine dresses and the kaleidoscopic groupings of colour. And it was the hero and chief figure of that gay world who was beside her ; who was devoting himself to her entertainment ; who had pretty plainly intimated that on the eventful evening in question she and her immediate companions were not likely to be neglected.

By this time they were well away from the little town, and out in the silence of the country—a silence so hushed and still that the crunching of cartwheels on the road could be heard at a surprising distance. It was an ideal day for a lovers' ramble—an April day so fine and rare and clear that it seemed as if summer had already taken possession of the land; the heavens a dome of fleckless sapphire; the slopes of heather and pasture basking and breeding in the grateful warmth; far away beyond the waters of Loch Linnhe the long range of mountains become etherealised and dream-like—the mountains of Kingairloch, of Morven, of 'Muile nam mor-bheann,' Mull of the great hills. And then they came in sight of the lower end of Lismore, and the lighthouse, and the entrance to the Sound.

"That is a beautiful way your steamer goes," said she, "and I am sure you must be pleased to be on so fine a boat."

"I'm sick-tired of the whole thing," he answered her, bluntly. And then, seeing that she looked startled, he went on: "I'm sick-tired of looking after the landing of herring-boxes, and collecting ninepences and eighteenpences from half-drunk drovers. And as for any position or consideration: now and again a shore acquaintance will come up and pretend to be friendly, expecting me to let him off for half-fare; and the laird's wife, when she comes along the gangway, may toss me a civil word, if she thinks I can help her with her luggage; but the daughters—the young ladies—oh, dear, no!—if they take any notice of me at all, they stare at me as they would stare at a policeman. But look at the purser on one of the Australian liners, for example: there's a position, now—there's consideration: maybe two or three hundred first-class passengers on board, and the purser of far more consequence to them than the captain—getting up dances and entertainments for them, and taking a chief part—and every evening at the head of his own table in the saloon, in dress uniform, with his particular friends dining along with him. That is something; that is not like landing herring-boxes, or getting the passengers out of the way to have half-a-dozen stirks driven on board. Yes, indeed, I'm sick-tired of it—whatever the tourists and people of that sort may say about the beautiful mountains

and the islands. Give me a chance, and I tell you I'm off!"

"Are you—are you wishing to go away from here altogether!" she said—with the strangest look on her face.

Probably he did not notice. He answered her with much equanimity—

"Give me the chance, as I say. There's more fun and frolic in foreign parts—and more to see——"

"But—but one should be fondest of one's own country," she said, rather faintly.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "when one's own country finds one a good berth. But the fact is that the purserships of the Australian liners don't grow on blackberry bushes: and in the meantime, Miss Barbara, I've just to put up with what I've got, as best I can."

And so, with varied discourse—quite unconcerned on his part, on hers more strained and nervously anxious—they continued on their way, and eventually reached Cowal Ferry, which was the goal of their fortuitous excursion. But at this point there is a solitary little inn, overlooking the low-murmuring rapids of the sea-loch; and it occurred to Jack Ogilvie that he ought not to let his companion set out on the return journey without offering her some slight refreshment.

"Will you not step inside," said he, in his off-hand fashion, "and sit down for a few minutes, and have a cup of tea, or a glass of milk, or something of the kind? It's a good long way back—and the afternoon is drawing on."

She hesitated, but only for a moment. Being with him, walking with him, was the astounding and bewildering thing: to go into a room and sit down seemed nothing different from that, nothing more remarkable. So quite obediently she followed him into the narrow passage; and when he opened the door of an apartment that was clearly intended for the public—for there were tea-things on the table, and scones, and marmalade, and the like—she went in there too, and took a modest seat. As for him, he made himself entirely at home. He rang the bell, and ordered tea. Then he turned to examine the pictures—mostly chromo-lithographs of German origin. He brought her the surprising and miraculous ornaments from the mantel-piece,

and he was laughing at the snow-white poodles and the whiskered pards. And again, when the simple repast was placed before them, he drew in a chair for her, and seated himself at the head of the table, and proceeded to help her, with an amiable solicitude. It was all like a dream to Barbara. She hardly knew how she had come hither. The scones were scones of magic—when the sun-god himself was laughing and talking to her.

In the midst of all this the door was opened and there appeared—Long Lauchie the shoemaker. Lauchlan was in a genial mood; he did not stay to apologise for any intrusion; he shut the door behind him, and advanced to the table, and pulled in a chair.

“Aw, it’s a fine thing to come among friends,” he said; and he was smiling with a vague benignity, “and I was seeing you in the distance, before you came near the house. Ay, if it had not been for friends and for a friendly glass here or there, where would I be now? Ay, Dyeea, I thought I was never to be back in a Christian country again!—and if it had not been for the farmer at the head of Glen Sharay—well, I will pay him that bottle back as sure as I am a living man.” He stopped, and regarded the Purser with a look of mysterious significance. “Now, Mr. Ogilvie, was you hearing any news?”

“News? What news?” inquired Ogilvie, who bore the interruption quite good-humouredly.

“Ay, was you hearing any news?” he repeated.

“News?—news about what?” said the Purser.

“Aw, well, there might be news about many things—and maybe about deer,” Lauchlan said, evasively, and there was a dark merriment in his eyes. “I am not saying anything, but maybe there might be news——”

Here the young servant lass came in, and Lauchlan’s face at once became solemn and impenetrable. But when she had placed the whisky and the tumbler before him, and departed, he burst into a fit of soft and happy laughter.

“Aw, yes, indeed, there may be news in a day or two,” he went on, and clearly he was chuckling over this secret that he would not reveal. “But I was not saying anything to any one—how could I, when there was no one from one glen to the next, and from one hill to the next?—as sure as

death you would not believe that the country is such a wide country, with roads leading to no place at ahl. And if it had not been for the farmer at Glen Sharay—he's the man for me—with many and many's the good song, sitting at the table ahl the night through—and a parting glass at the door in the morning——”

“Well, Mr. MacIntyre,” said the Purser, pleasantly, “you seem to have met with some adventures; but what in heaven's name is that kind of shoe you're wearing?”

Lauchlan looked down at his left foot, which was encased in an old battered shoe of portentous dimensions, with straws sticking out at the top.

“That was the farmer too,” said he, vaguely. “He lent it to me—and it was rayther large—and we put some straw into it——”

“Yes, but what has become of your own shoe?” was the next and natural question.

“I am not remembering,” said Lauchlan, with a kind of abstracted look in his eyes. “I am not remembering, just at the moment. Maybe I gave it to a beggar, poor man.”

It was Barbara who now interposed to say it was time for them to go, and Ogilvie at once acceded; but Lauchlan MacIntyre wanted to finish his liquor in peace; so they were well content to leave him. And as these two now walked away into Duntroone, the rosy evening shone along the blood-red leafless heather; and the withered pasture-slopes, not yet answering to the summons of the spring, burned a warm gold. But if the world around them seemed all aflame, the heavens above them were of a pure and pale lilac hue, with not even a fleck of cloud visible anywhere. The silence had grown still more profound with the dying down of the day; and all the birds were mute, save for one solitary thrush, on some distant bough, that kept charming his mate with his clear and silvery trills. Twilight was around them as they entered the small town; and here and there a golden star appeared among the rigging in the harbour. When Barbara got upstairs to the semi-darkness of her own room, she sat down without taking off any of her finery: the gates of wonderland had just been closed, it is true, but the glory and glamour were still before her dazzled eyes.

On this same evening the schoolmaster was seated in Mrs. Maclean's parlour, and he was in an unusually cheerful mood. He was endeavouring to show, as he placidly smoked his pipe, and watched Jessie's nimble fingers busy with her needle; the little widow attending to the shop when necessary—he was endeavouring to show that the world was progressively and surely becoming wiser, this happy result being brought about by the gradual and inevitable elimination of fools. The fools having become extinct, must not the residue of mankind enjoy a larger average of wisdom? And then he began to enumerate the various classes and sections and subsections of fools who were by degrees extinguishing themselves out of the universe. There were, for example, the people who went with a lighted candle to discover the origin of an escape of gas; undoubtedly they were removing themselves from amongst us. And there were the people who made fast the main-sheet of a sailing-boat. And there were the people who ate tinned lobster. And the people who got into or out of a train in motion. And the people who made parachute descents, who performed with wild beasts, who dived from bridges, and the like.

"And the people who muddle their brains with whisky," he added, in an undertone, as the tall form of the shoemaker appeared at the half-opened door.

But Long Lauchlan did not overhear this remark; if he had overheard it, he probably would have taken no notice; he was in a benignant mood. For he had been wandering along from one crony's house to another, rejoiced to be back again in human society, and nursing the secret and blissful consciousness of having been engaged in an exploit that would soon be the talk and astonishment of all the West Highlands. And when he had established himself among this further group of friends, he was as darkly mysterious as ever; but very happy.

"It is a great thing," he was saying complacently (with one foot hidden beneath his chair), "it is a great thing to be meeting with adventures. Here have I been out of the world for two days and more—ay, maybe three days, but I am not so sure, for it was a wild country. And it's not so long since I went through to Fort William, and made

the red-headed carpenter flee like a hare—aw, Dyce, you should have seen him run down the street as if the duvvle was after him; and not long before that again I was at the bringing of you home, Mr. Henderson, from among the rocks; and not long before that was the wreck of the *Sanda*, ay, and the funeral of Knockalanish, and the coming away with Miss Barbara. And I'm sure I could scarce believe my eyes when I sah her this evening—her and Ogilvie just like lad and lass—as they were drawing near to Cowal Ferry; and then afterwards the two of them sitting very comfortable-like in the parlour of the inn——”

“Lanchlan MacIntyre, what are you talking about?” the widow broke in, angrily. “Are you havoring? Are you out of your senses? Barbara—in the inn at Cowal Ferry——?”

Thus unexpectedly and sharply challenged, the shoemaker was constrained to make good his veracity; he had to give details; he insisted on the truth of his story; while Jess Maclean became more and more indignant.

“Mr. MacIntyre, you have been asleep and dreaming!” she exclaimed. “Barbara sitting in the inn-parlour with Ogilvie the Purser?—you never saw any such thing, that I know! Barbara had plenty to do about the house this afternoon; she could not have gone out—to Cowal or anywhere else——”

But the shoemaker was obdurate.

“Very well, then,” said Jess, promptly, “I will go over this very minute, and see Barbara—I will hear from herself.”

And therewith she rose, and flung a shawl round her shoulders, and passed through the front shop.

Meanwhile, amid all this insistence and indignant denial, Allan Henderson had remained sternly silent, the hard-lined ascetic face perhaps a trifle greyer than usual. And now that Jess had gone, he paid no heed to the others; he seemed to listen with a morbid intensity for her return; his gaze was fixed furtively but unswervingly on the door.

Jess Maclean was absent for only a few minutes. When she came back into the room, she turned to Long Lauchie; her eyes were averted; she dared not look in Allan's direction.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. MacIntyre," said she, humbly, and with the most painful embarrassment, "you were quite right. Barbara was at Cowal Ferry this evening—and—and I suppose she met Ogilvie by accident."

And then the schoolmaster knew his doom.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT AN OPEN DOOR.

AND yet he would know it from herself. On the following afternoon, as soon as his school-work was over, he left the dull grey building and at once and hurriedly walked along to the house in Campbell Street. It was a wild and stormy evening; and wild and stormy were the conflicting passions that strove for mastery in his heart—black hate and jealousy of the man who had entrapped an innocent girl into these clandestine relations—a stung pride that even now prompted him to turn, and go back home, and have done with her for ever—and then again a sort of desperate hope that all might yet be well, that some explanation would be forthcoming, that the beautiful eyes might still have a friendly look for him. This way and that surged these emotions and fancies—perhaps with the darker predominating. For she had allowed him to believe that he might win her for his wife; and she had listened to his schemes, in which she was supposed to have a personal interest; and if, while thus giving him tacit encouragement, she was holding secret communication with that other? When Allan Henderson proceeded up the narrow stairway and knocked at the door, his brows were sombre enough; and he was steeling himself to indignation and reproach.

The girl Christina admitted him, and, in answer to his question, showed him into the parlour, where he found Barbara alone, engaged in needle-work. On his entering, she looked up startled, and even apprehensive, for he had never called in this fashion before; but at all events she rose to bid him welcome; and then she civilly asked him

to take a chair. Her manner was cold and reserved ; she seemed to be on her guard ; it was for him to speak.

But whither had fled all the anger and reprobation with which he had come armed ? The mere sight of her had dispelled all that ; the touch of her hand had thrilled him strangely ; and now that she had returned to her work—now that he could with impunity regard the modestly lowered lashes, the fresh and sweet complexion, the graceful outline of forehead and cheek and throat—in place of any wrathful upbraiding there was only an irresistible longing to possess and defend. She was a solitary creature—untaught in the ways of the world—she wanted someone to protect her from harm. And then, and above all, she was so maddeningly beautiful that his heart seemed to suffocate within him : it was he, not she, who was stunned and bewildered by this sudden juxtaposition.

“That is a very pretty dress,” said he—as the outcome of all his tumultuous wrongs !

“I am altering it a little,” she answered, without raising her eyes.

There was a moment or two of silence.

“It is clever of you to be able to do that for yourself,” he observed, anxious to propitiate.

“I have been used to it all my life,” she made answer. “My mother was ill two or three years before she died ; and I had to do everything.”

And now she had recovered somewhat from her vague apprehension, and was inclined to be a little more friendly. He had no reproaches to make, then ? It was only a visit from a sweetheart, or one wishing to be a sweetheart ?—and that any girl could take only as a compliment.

“I suppose there was not much fine dressmaking at Kilree ?” he remarked again.

“We could not have afforded it in any case,” she replied. “And indeed I am rather frightened about what I am doing now ; for this is the dress I am to wear on the evening of the Glasgow Choir being here.”

It was an unintentional shaft, but it struck deep. For that was the evening the Purser had talked so much of ; and Barbara would be there—attracting attention, no doubt, if not by this costume she was now working at, then

at least by the symmetry of her figure and the elegance of her gait. He was almost driven to ask her whether she thought it seemly to go to a dance within a certain number of months of her father's funeral; but he forbore: he would not quarrel with her; it was so wonderful to find her in some small measure gracious.

"Have you been over the way?" she went on. "I heard from Jessie that you looked in yesterday."

And this also was unlucky: it re-awoke his jealous tortures of the previous afternoon. He could no longer be silent.

"It was then," he said, in measured tones—and he watched her—"it was then I was told of your having been at Cowal Ferry with Ogilvie the purser."

She flushed hotly, but she replied with some touch of disdain—

"Yes, they make a great deal of that, for a small matter."

"That is no small matter," said he, slowly and seriously, "that may affect a girl's good name."

At this she fired up—her cheeks still crimson.

"And who says anything against my good name?" she demanded.

His breath came and went; he did not know what to say—whether to let the darker passions in his heart have utterance—or whether it was still possible to forget and forgive, on account of the beauty of her raven hair, her liquid eyes, and the splendid lines of her throat.

"For myself I care little what Ogilvie's character may be," said he, stiffly and ominously; "but a young girl would look better after her reputation who did not happen to be found with him in a wayside public-house."

She raised her head quickly; her eyes were merciless; her lips were pale.

"As for my reputation," she said—hesitating a little in her excitement to find proper expression in English, "I am glad—it is not in the hands of such friends as you!"

"Barbara!" he exclaimed—as if she had struck him.

But she was passionate also.

"And as for Mr. Ogilvie," she continued, in the same taunting and angry fashion, "if you have anything to say

against him, why do you not say it to himself? Why do you come to me with the story?—and suspecting harm where there is no harm. I do not wish for any more friends of that kind. Is it a great thing to have a cup of tea at Cowal Ferry?—well, that is my business, and not the business of any one else: and I will look after my own good name, and no thanks to anyone—no thanks to my friends! And if you have any complaint against Mr. Ogilvie, I think you would do better to go to himself; and maybe he will have his answer for you——”

Henderson rose to his feet, his dark eyes aflame, his cheeks ashen-grey.

“There you have spoken a true word, Barbara,” said he—though the effort of speech appeared almost to stifle him. “It is with Ogilvie I will deal. With you I have no quarrel. If he is trying to take advantage of your ignorance, I will settle scores with him. He knows, if you do not know. I will ask him a question, and I will make him answer——”

Again she looked up quickly: there was something in the expression of his face that caused her alarm.

“What—what will you do?”

“Well, with you I have no quarrel,” was his only reply. “At any rate you and I can part as friends.”

But at this her eyes fell again, and she would take no notice of his extended hand.

“I am friends with my friends,” said she, sullenly, “and not with others.”

He stood for a moment, irresolute, gazing at her; then he abruptly turned on his heel—his brows black and drawn together, his under-jaw stern almost to savageness; and in another couple of seconds he had quitted the house.

* * * * *

On the morning of the day on which the members of the Glasgow Gaelic Choir were to be entertained by their Highland comrades, Mr. McFadyen walked along to the railway-station. The hush of noon had fallen over the place; there were no trains either arriving or departing; and when the town-councillor stepped into the station-master's office, Mr. Gilmour looked up from his work as if interruption were welcome.

"Can ye spare me a few minutes, James?" the visitor inquired.

"Directly—in a second," answered the station-master. He signed the document he had been scanning, and returned it to the messenger who was standing by. Then he rose from from his desk. "Now I'm with you, Peter," he said, blithely.

"I want you to come along to the house—there's something I would like your advice about," said Peter, with quite unusual shyness.

The good natured station-master at once assented; he took down his cap; and presently the two friends were outside and making round by the harbour.

"I say, Jamie," observed the councillor, with an assumption of indifference, "What do you think, now, of the Highland dress for showing off the figure?"

"That depends on the figure, I would say," responded the station-master, bluntly.

"A fine answer!" said Mr. McFadyen, with scorn. "Cannot ye understand what I mean? I mean the Highland dress as compared with any other dress——"

"Are you going to sport the kilt, Peter—is that what you are aiming at?" cried the station-master. "Are you going to make a chieftain of yourself? Are you going to wear two feathers in your cap? Or three, and make yourself a chief? Dod, ye might as well be a chief as a chieftain, when it's only an imaginary clan you've got at your back. For who ever heard of the clan McFadyen?"

"Who ever heard of the clan Gilmour?" retorted the councillor, angrily.

"There you're out of it," said the tall thin man with the bright red hair. "There you're out of it, Peter, my friend," he repeated, in saturnine triumph. "For at least my name is Highland. 'Gilmour'—'Gilliemore'—the big young man. But McFadyen—McFadyen!—who on God's earth could ever find out the meaning of a name like that? And maybe you'll be for saying next that there's a McFadyen tartan!"

"Oh, yes, you're very clever!" remarked the councillor, peevishly. "Do you know what they say about people that are as clever as you?—they say 'You're so clever you could

steal the eggs from under a heron, with her two eyes watching you.' But although you're so mighty clever, Mr. Jamie, perhaps you don't know that there are three tartans, the clan tartan, the hunting tartan, and the dress tartan; and when it comes to the dress tartan, you can choose for yourself——"

"Peter," said Gilmour, with a cackle of irreverent laughter. "I would give my best pair of breeks to see ye going through the town rigged out in the royal Stewart!"

"Indeed!" said Peter, contemptuously. "But if you were still a little more clever, you would understand that people do not go about the streets in a dress tartan."

Nevertheless, when they reached the councillor's house, this tone of acerbity could not be maintained; for Peter was seriously anxious for advice, and perhaps even hoping for sympathetic approval; and so, when he had ushered the station-master into his principal room, he said, in a more amicable fashion—

"I'll tell ye the truth, Jamie. There's the entertainment to the Glasgow Choir this evening, and the dance, and all the rest of it; and I was saying to myself that that young spark of an Ogilvie was giving himself too many airs with his swallow-tail coat and his studs and the like. I've a coat of that kind myself, that I got about a dizzen years ago for the deputation to Glasgow; but I was trying it on the other day, and it made me look fearfu' like a Free Kirk minister on a platform. And then says I to myself, 'Well, there's other ways o' taking the shine out of that young sprig——'" He paused. "They came home last night," he resumed, rather timidly glancing towards his friend. "Man, I wish ye would tell me whether you think they'll do——"

"Let's have a look at them, then!" said Gilmour.

Thereupon Mr. McFadyen left the room, returning shortly with a number of parcels, which he opened and displayed on the table. Everything was here to make up a correct Highland costume—cap, doublet, vest, kilt, sporran, hose, and shoes; while dirk and sgean-dubh were brave with cairngorms and silver.

"But put them on, man!" the station-master remon-

strated. "Go away and put them on, and let's see how ye look!"

"I'm not sure whether the dirk and the sgean-dubh should be worn at such a gathering," said the councillor, with some diffidence.

"Oh, go away and get the things on!" his friend said, impatiently. "I want to see if ye look at home in them."

Well, when Mr. McFadyen, after a good ten minutes' absence, reappeared at the door of the parlour, he certainly did not look at home in this resplendent costume; for he was extremely embarrassed, and anxious, and self-conscious; but all the same the station-master had not the heart to criticise, much less to smile. It was so abnormal to find Peter—the self-confident, self-assertive Peter—in this sensitive and almost supplicatory mood that out of mere compassion and to encourage him Gilmour said he thought the general effect was just first-rate. Peter was immensely relieved.

"You've got to get accnstomed to it, of course," said he. "Naturally, you've got to get accustomed to it. And what's more, you've got to get used to people looking at you."

"Man, you'll cut a dash at the Highland Games!" continued Gilmour, with friendly approval. "It suits ye, Peter—I tell ye it suits ye."

And now Mr. McFadyen, still further flattered and puffed up, was determined to show that he was not afraid to challenge alien scrutiny. He rang the bell. Presently there appeared the maidservant Sarah, a great, big, stupid-looking, porridge-fed rubicund lass, with staring blue eyes.

"Sarah——" said her master, with lofty unconcern.

"Yes, sir."

"Ye'll go along to Mr. Dunbar——"

"Yes, sir."

"And tell him——"

"Yes, sir."

The fact is, the tall lass was saying "Yes, sir," quite incoherently, and without in the least listening to the message that was being delivered to her—so wholly engrossed was she by the startling spectacle that her master now presented.

"——And tell him to have a machine here to night at a

quarter to eight. A quarter to eight—do ye hear me?—not a minute later, for I have to call for some friends before going on to the concert——”

“Yes, sir,” said Sarah, her eyes all-devouring.

“Go away, then,” said her master, sharply, “and mind : not a minute after a quarter to eight.”

She made a sudden jerky effort to retire—apparently overcome by some extraordinary emotion ; she succeeded in getting the door between her and the two men ; and then, the moment it was shut, they heard in the passage a tremendous explosion of long-suppressed, incontrollable, half-choked giggling. The infection was irresistible. In spite of himself the station-master burst into a wild guffaw of laughter ; he roared and roared ; he could not stop—though his face was purple with shame ; his long, angular carcase was shaken by the violence of this ungovernable merriment, and he struck his knees with his fists.

“I beg your pardon, Peter,” he gasped—with tears running down his cheeks. “I did not intend it—upon my soul. I did not intend it—it was that daft lass—I’m sure she’s half-witted—” And here he set to roaring and laughing again. “That daft idiot of a lass!—what on earth did she break out like that for—a giggling idiot!—I see nothing myself to laugh at—except—except that she’s just a downright born idiot!”

“Ay, and idiocy seems to be catching,” said Mr. McFadyen, who had preserved a calm dignity as the best answer to this disgraceful ebullition.

“Well, I must be going,” the penitent station-master said, as he glanced at his watch and rose. “Never you mind, Peter : I think you look fine in the tartan—and—and I’m sure I beg your pardon for a bit friendly laugh.”

“You’re welcome—yon’re welcome,” said the councillor, with much state ; and ceremoniously and stiffly he conducted the station-master to the door, and bade him good-day.

But all that afternoon Peter McFadyen was tormented by a thousand vacillating decisions and arguments and fears. He could not attend to his business ; he would leave his office, and run upstairs to his bedroom, and contemplate that distracting, tempting, dreaded costume.

Then, as the hour arrived at which he had perforce to dress one way or another for the concert, he grew desperate. Was he to be deterred by the imbecile hilarity of a turnip-headed scullery wench? The Highland garb was no novelty in Duntroone; why should he shrink from observant eyes? And at last, in a fit of morose anger, the result of his reflections over human vacuity and buffoonery, he deliberately arrayed himself in the tartan; and punctually at a quarter to eight he descended, got into the 'machine,' and set out for Campbell Street. On this occasion the big, porridgy servant-lass exercised a little more self-control; and her master drove away with something of a lighter heart.

But as he was ascending the stair towards the widow's rooms, his courage once more oozed away from him; and when he was shown into the parlour, in which Jessie Maclean was waiting, a dreadful consciousness broke over him that he had made a mistake. Jess, poor girl, tried to pretend that she did not notice anything unusual in his attire; but there was a slight flush of embarrassment on her face; and the councillor knew—somehow he knew—that in her heart she was contemplating with dismay the prospect of having to go to the concert with him in this guise.

"Barbara will be ready in a few minutes," Jess said, uneasily, and with her eyes downcast.

But this casual remark was an inspiration. There was still a precious interval?—there was still a blessed chance of escape? Peter's decision was taken at once. He began to laugh.

"So I have not frightened ye, Miss Jessie?" said he, with a jocosely humorous air. "I thought I would have a little bit of fun; I thought ye'd get a fright if ye fancied I was going to the concert and the dance as a Highland chief. But I'm not so far off my head; no, no; I'm not so far left to myself as to wear things like these—except for a joke, ye understand—except for a joke. And ye may tell Miss Barbara not to hurry; though I'll no be long—no—I'll be back in a jiff." And therewith the councillor, his soul greatly uplifted within him, hurried downstairs, jumped into the 'machine' that had brought him, was

driven off home, and there rapidly exchanged his Highland rig for a more sober outfit. When he returned to Mrs. Maclean's house, Barbara was fully equipped; and the three of them drove away to the Drill Hall, Mr. McFadyen being the merriest of the merry.

It was altogether a most successful evening. The Glasgow Choir sang beautifully; at supper Mr. McFadyen welcomed them in a speech that was universally applauded; and when at length the hall was cleared for dancing, everyone was in the highest of spirits. Barbara, in especial, was all animation; she seemed to drink in excitement from this gay scene; there was a tinge of colour in her cheek, a glow in her great eyes, that told of her delight. Moreover, Jack Ogilvie had not forgotten his promise; he made Barbara and Jess and the councillor objects of special attention; any one could see they were a favoured group. And at supper, if he did not actually sit with them—for he had to look chiefly after the guests from a distance—at least he came along and chatted with them at times.

"And what dances are you going to give me, Miss Barbara?" said he, on one of these occasions. "No. 1 is a quadrille: Suppose we make up a party for that? And you must give me a waltz—and maybe two before the night is out. No. 9 is a mazourka——"

"We must not stay here late," interposed Jess—seeing that Barbara was ready to accept all the dances that the Purser proposed.

"Come, come, it is I that am in authority here," the councillor insisted, "and I'll have no spiriting away of Cinderellas before the proper time. We'll begin with the first quadrille—the four of us here vis-à-vis—and we'll see about the other dances as they come. I'm just in the mood for enjoying myself the night; yes, I'm that; and we'll show them how to keep it up!"

But of all the varied features of this memorable evening none was more remarkable, in Jessie Maclean's eyes, than the ease and elegance with which Barbara danced. Where and how had the Highland lass, away out in the rude island, picked up such an accomplishment, and attained to such a proficiency? Her naturally graceful figure was

seen to the best advantage in all these evolutions ; no wonder (Jess said to herself) that the young men regarded her with covertly admiring glances, and appeared proud and pleased when they were privileged to join hands with her in coming and going. Never before had the councillor found himself so much sought after by those young sparks of whom he was naturally inclined to be somewhat jealous.

There was one other who, for a few terrible seconds, beheld Barbara in this her hour of display and triumph. The Drill Hall of Duntroone is situated in an out-of-the-way and ill-lighted lane ; and the schoolmaster, wandering aimlessly about in the dark, found himself, he hardly knew why, drawn to that long and dusky building from which sounds of music issued into the hollow air. He approached nearer and nearer. The entrance-door, for the sake of ventilation, had been left half-open ; there were two or three idle lads hanging about and looking in ; he also, if he chose, might gaze upon that brilliant throng, himself unseen. He wished to go away, and could not ; some powerful fascination dragged him onward ; at last the dark and glowing eyes were staring in, from this outer gloom. And as it chanced it was a waltz that was being performed ; the couples circling swiftly and easily ; the music rising and falling in cadence. And then his eyes seemed to be seared as with a red-hot iron : there was Barbara, in all the flush of her youthful grace and beauty ; and Ogilvie it was who held her one hand clasped in his, whose arm encircled her yielding form. It was plaintive music that sounded down the long hall—so plaintive that there almost appeared to be some cry of human agony in it—some despairing note of severance and loss and farewell. Trembling and haggard of visage, the onlooker drew himself away and hid himself in the night : it was as if he had been blinded, and knew not whither he was going.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE VERGE.

ALL through the black hours of that night he wandered round the shore and the rocks, while the moving world of waters moaned in the dark, and the golden ray of Lismore burned steadily. And still he seemed to hear the low and piteous strains of waltz-music, that spoke of tragic separation and farewell ; and still he seemed to be at a half-open door, sheltered by the obscurity, and gazing in upon that brilliant throng, with one figure there receding from him, as it were, and being lost to him for ever. When would they have done with their dancing ? When would the colours fade, and the lights go out, and the hush of sleep fall over the small town ? The sound of the revelry appeared to follow him : he heard it all through the unvaried, incessant, mysterious murmur of the sea.

The long night went by ; a pale and wan glow slowly grew in the east ; the hills and woods became dimly distinguishable ; the trembling plain of water gradually revealed itself, livid and solitary ; beyond, the mountains of Mull and Morven were still swathed in heavy folds of cloud. And what was this object nearer at hand—this first sign of human habitation—what but the grey little inn at Cowal Ferry, surrounded by its silent homestead ? At this time of the morning it appeared but as the ghost of a house ; and the tale connected with it seemed to have likewise acquired a kind of remoteness ; would the day break into clear and white light, and show firmer and hopefuller things, and drive away those distracting phantoms of the past ?

Towards eight o'clock or thereabouts he knew that Jess Maclean and the young girl Christina would come downstairs in order to open the shop ; and a little before that hour he returned to Duntroone, passing along Campbell Street. He saw the two girls appear and cross the half-empty thoroughfare. He watched Christina take down the shutters. And when, after a few minutes, she went back

to the house, leaving Jess in sole possession, he walked forward more quickly. Jess was in the front shop when he entered.

"You are early astir, Jessie, after your last night's gaieties," said he, with apparent calm; but despite this forced composure, there was something in his tone, something in his aspect, too, that caused her serious disquiet.

"What is the matter, Allan?" she demanded at once.

"Well, I have come to you in my trouble," said he. "Does that surprise you? It seems but natural I should come to you. Your own life is so placid and happy that suffering and tortured wretches come to you as if by some kind of instinct, for consolation and sympathy. And you can tell me—Jess, I'm sure you can tell me," he went on, in a more hurried and anxious manner, "whether there is anything between Barbara and Ogilvie. What is it? What is there? Why should there be any secrecy? How did she come to be with him in the inn at Cowal; and how did neither your mother nor you know she was going? What does he mean by it? He can have his pick and choice of so many—so they say—he gives himself the airs of a lady-killer—why should he turn aside for a simple girl like Barbara? I went to her, and asked her," he continued, in his too evident distress, "and she had nothing for me but angry words and taunts. Plainly enough she told me it was none of my business—that I had no right to interfere. And perhaps I have not; I had hoped for some better understanding with her; but now, it seems, I must not even speak. And yet how can one stand by and look on—when you see a young girl ignorant of the ways of the world being made a fool of, made sport of, for the amusement of an empty-headed fribble? Is that what it is? Or what else is it? What does it mean?"

"Come into the parlour, Allan, and sit down," said Jess Maclean, in her gentle fashion; and he followed her into the room—but he remained standing, his eyes eagerly searching for an answer in the expression of her face.

And yet it was about himself that she was mostly concerned.

"You are not looking well," said she—and somehow she half-guessed that he had been wandering to and fro during

the night. "Have you had your breakfast this morning, Allan?"

"Never mind about that," he replied. And then he proceeded, rapidly: "Tell me, Jessie—what am I to believe about Barbara? Is there anything between her and Ogilvie? And is she concealing it?—and why? You must know. You are with her constantly. And I can appeal to you for an honest answer and a friendly answer. You will tell me the truth—whatever it is; and whatever it is, the sooner it is known the better. To you anyway I can appeal, without being taunted and scorned."

Jess was quietly and quickly stirring up the fire, and putting on the kettle, and getting out the tea-pot and the like; and as she went on with these little preparations—the object of which was in nowise perceived by the schoolmaster—she said in her tranquil way:

"I would not bother much about Ogilvie, if I were you, Allan. I don't suppose he means anything. He is always running after one pretty face or another; and there's safety in numbers; I hardly imagine he can mean anything serious with regard to Barbara. A bit of amusement, perhaps——"

"Amusement?" he repeated, vehemently. "Amusement that may wreck her peace of mind—that may ruin her life? If that is the state of affairs, it is time for one of us to step in; and whether I have the right or not, I will assume the right. She shall not be left defenceless, simply through her ignorance. And perhaps," he said, "perhaps you, too, will tell me it is none of my business——"

"I don't think, Allan, you ever found me blaming you for anything," Jess made answer: she was putting a white cloth over the little table.

"Jess, I beg your pardon!" he said, with instant remorse. "If I have one friend, it's you. I am always safe in coming to you. But I am all at sixes and sevens; worried and harassed; unable to understand what is happening around me. I wonder if you know how other people must envy you your quiet and peaceful life—how you make one wish to be rid for ever of maddening hopes and aims. It must be so fine to be contentedly happy—to be without a care."

"Without a care," murmured Jess, almost to herself. "Ay, just that, Allan. Without a care. You may well

say that. Without a care." Her back was towards him, for she was about to fetch down a cruet-stand from the cupboard; so that unobserved she managed to brush away a tear or two that had started to her lashes. Then she turned. "Now, Allan," said she, cheerfully, "sit down at once. It's but little we keep over here; only you can't go along to the school without a mouthful by way of breakfast."

He would have refused, but she insisted; and eventually, out of mere gratitude, he was forced to sit down.

"I looked in at the Drill Hall," he said, slowly and in sombre fashion—and small was the heed he paid to these things before him, though Jess stood by him waiting upon him, as if he were an infant. "I saw Barbara—she was dancing with Ogilvie."

"Well, now," observed Jess, with much blitheness of manner, "is it not surprising that she should have learnt to dance so well, away out in such a place as Kilree! And no one suspecting it either. But that is the strange thing about Barbara: if you do not find out for yourself, she will never tell you——"

"Ay, have you discovered that?" he said, glancing towards her quickly. "Have you discovered that too?" And then he continued—it was a relief to talk—"Do you know that sometimes she seems to me altogether an enigma; I cannot make her out; it is as if she had depths of character that no one around her understands as yet. And then again these appear to me mere formless and vacant spaces—the vacant spaces of youth, that time and experience will fill up. Besides, her natural shyness has to be taken into account—a shyness only to be expected in one brought up in that solitary island, and then coming among strangers——"

"I am sure," said Jess, "mother and I do not wish her to regard us as strangers—far indeed from that; but I think she hides herself from us as much as from others; and of course when any one prefers to keep their own counsel, it would only be impertinence to press questions."

"Then Barbara has said nothing to you about Ogilvie?" he asked, of a sudden.

"Not a word," was the definite answer. "Not a word—and until she offers us her confidence, we are not likely to

make ourselves intrusive. If Barbara wishes to keep her own secrets, she is welcome."

He had pushed away his plate. His hands were resting on his knees; his eyes were downcast, in profound meditation.

"She is a strange creature," said he. "I had done nothing to anger her. Well, yes: perhaps she was in the right in resenting my interference. When I warned her—when I presumed to warn her—perhaps it was only her maidenly pride that retorted. As you say, when she chooses to keep silent, that may be merely her natural habit; and of course she would be indignant on being pressed with questions. It is quite wonderful, Jessie, how you find excuses for people; how you seek for the best that is in them; your disposition is so good-natured; you want the world to go easily with every one. And indeed, whenever I have a talk with you, it does seem as if things were more hopeful, as if troubles and difficulties could be overcome; and you must never think that I am not grateful to you because I am a bad hand at making pretty speeches. You must just understand. When you meet a human being who seems to have the faculty of reconciling you to the harsh terms of existence, it is a marvellous kind of thing, and you ought to be grateful—but perhaps you have not quite got the knack of saying so——"

"Enough, enough, Allan," said Jess—her face burning with pleasure: for when had she received such praise from him before?

Then he got to his feet.

"I must along to the school now, Jessie," said he.

"And do not put yourself out about the Purser," she observed to him, as her parting word. "He has too many strings to his bow. And besides, I have heard him say that he wanted to leave this place altogether. Surely, Barbara must have too much sense to attach herself to a sailor-lad, that may be off to the West Indies to-morrow. And if you and she have had a quarrel, you'll just have to set to work to make it up again."

He went away much lighter of heart because of her sisterly kindness and wise talk; but his temperament was brooding rather than sanguine; and during the long school-

hours of mechanical and ungrateful toil, his thoughts would go back to the position in which he had been placed by Barbara's disdainful challenge. 'If you want any explanations—if you think you have been injured,' she had practically said, 'go to Ogilvie: he will answer you—he will answer for us both.' It was scornful advice, but it fitted in only too readily with his own humour. He had not got that under-jaw for nothing; and the longer that the lined and knit brows pondered over the problem now before him, the more definite became his resolve that Ogilvie should not go on his way without one word of question, perhaps even of menace. For the moment, indeed, that was impossible: on the day following the concert and dance, the *Aros Castle*, her steam-tubes mended, sailed for Loch Sunart.

But, as it chanced, on the very afternoon of her return, the schoolmaster caught sight of Jack Ogilvie, who was apparently leaving the outskirts of the town for a stroll; and in an instant all Jess's persuasive and kindly counsels had vanished from his mind: he saw in the distance only the man who had, from vanity, or devilment, or mere thoughtless disregard of consequences, been leading an inexperienced girl astray, and alienating her from her nearest friends. Without any very clear intention he followed. By the lodge-gate Ogilvie passed into the grounds surrounding the ruins of Duntroone Castle: these are thrown open to the public on certain days of the week; but at this season of the year, when there were no tourists abroad, the place was quite deserted; and in point of fact the Purser continued on his way through the woods without meeting a human being, whether or not he may have been aware that some one was behind him. In due course of time he came in sight of the sea again, and of the castle hill, with the ivied ruins lofty and dark against the west. He skirted a small bay, went along an avenue of elms, and began to ascend a steep slope. And all this time Henderson was in his wake: the schoolmaster knowing not what to think or what to do, so diverse were the doubts and impulses that occupied his brain. But momentarily his face was growing darker.

Of course he could not always maintain this equal distance

between himself and his enemy, for the Purser, having reached the summit of the hill, stopped short, and began to look around him—at the wide panorama, stretching from Ardencape in the south to Morven and Kingairloch in the north. It was towards the close of the day; there was a steely light in the breaks of the clouded sky, and a metallic gleam on the restlessly lapping water; but over Mull way there were great masses of soft rain-cloud slowly advancing, that threatened to blot out the livid glare and bring on premature night. And seemingly Ogilvie had no intention of remaining on this solitary eminence; having walked to the edge of the plateau and glanced downwards and around he idly turned to come away again; and then it was that he found himself face to face with Allan Henderson.

For a second the two men regarded each other; and instinctively no phrase of greeting was passed.

“I am glad to have the chance of a word with you alone,” the schoolmaster said, after this momentary silence.

“You need not have come so far,” said the Purser, who began to guess that his footsteps had been dogged.

“I was considering what I ought to say,” Henderson proceeded, apparently determined to keep a firm hold over himself.

“And have you considered?—for it is about time for me to be getting home,” Ogilvie made answer. Not a syllable had been uttered that could cause offence to either; but already the two men were in open antagonism.

“It is about Barbara Maclean——”

“Oh, indeed!”

“And I have a question to ask of you——”

“Suppose I don’t choose to answer it.”

“I will make you answer it.”

“Making? Making? That is easily said!”

The schoolmaster was breathing a little more hardly: that was all. Ogilvie had assumed a certain jaunty indifference of air.

“You’ve got to tell me what you mean,” Allan went on—with the dark eyes beginning to flame.

“Mean by what?” said the other, scornfully.

“Well enough you know! And don’t you think I am going to stand by, and let you make a plaything of a girl

like that, who does not know what all this nonsense may lead to. For I suppose it is nonsense. I do not imagine a fine gentleman like you could have any serious intentions——”

“And who made it your business to interfere?” the Purser said, defiantly.

“I have made it my business; and I mean to make it my business,” was the stern rejoinder. “If you have no regard for the good name of the girl, it is for others to see that she is warned, and that you are checked——”

“A rare fuss to make about nothing!” Ogilvie interjected again. “Why, anyone can call in at a tobacconist’s shop who has the price of an ounce of bird’s-eye.”

“Does the price of an ounce of bird’s-eye entitle you to sit in the parlour—or make assignations?”

“Oh, I’m sick of this rubbish!” the Purser exclaimed—and he made as if he would pass. But Henderson planted himself in front of him.

“No, you are not going yet. You are not going until you have given me explanations and made me certain promises. But how could I believe your promises—the promises of a miserable hound like you, that would lead a thoughtless girl into a compromising situation! What were she and you doing at Cowal Ferry?” he demanded, with increasing vehemence. “You considered it fine, I suppose, to have the story told about you! You considered it a joke, I suppose, that her good name should be put in peril—that she should become a byword——”

“You lie!”

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the schoolmaster had hurled himself upon him and seized him by the throat; and so sudden and so violent was the onset that both men rolled to the ground, the Purser writhing and struggling to free himself from this wild-cat grip, Henderson striving to pinion him to the earth. Ogilvie was no doubt the bulkier of the two; but the schoolmaster’s muscles were of iron, while hate and jealousy combined lent him a yet fiercer strength; so that it was in vain that the undermost of the adversaries fought and tore and flung himself this way and that in trying to liberate himself from this merciless grasp. And then something happened to Allan

Henderson. In their savage wrestling they had unwittingly approached the edge of the precipitous cliff; and of a sudden it chanced that the schoolmaster caught sight of a dull red patch, far below him, in the old garden lying between the castle-rock and the sea. It was probably a patch of withered herbage; but with a startling vividness it recalled to him what he had seen one day when in the company of a gamekeeper-friend—a wounded roe-deer having rolled over and down into a deep chasm, where it lay motionless and hardly to be distinguished from a heap of rusted bracken. And at this same instant it flashed through his brain that the man whose very life he now held in pawn might in another moment be lying away down there, without movement, an inanimate, indistinguishable thing, a horror to the eyes. He relaxed his grip.

“Come back,” he said, hoarsely. “There shall be no murder.”

And it was not until he was released that Jack Ogilvie perceived how near he had been to his doom. Thoroughly cowed—without a solitary word of threatening or bravado—he retreated from that ghastly verge, and shook his clothes straight, and departed down the hill, disappearing among the trees. After a while, amid the gathering dusk, the schoolmaster followed. As he slowly made his way back to the town, an orange spot here and there told of a lighted window and the coming night. And it may have seemed to him, in his sombre reverie, that it was more easy to seize an enemy, and pin him by the throat, and hold the power of life and death over him—it was more easy to do that than to win a single friendly look from a woman whose heart had wandered elsewhere.

CHAPTER XXV.

PRINCE BEELZEBUB.

It was a brilliant morning—the hills all the way from Mull to Kingairloch clear to the top—the sea a vivid and trembling blue—the sunlight warm on the yellow-green slopes of Kerrara. And the councillor, rejoicing in the sweet air and in the proud consciousness of manly vigour, was gaily humming to himself—

*‘If you on my dear one should gaze, should gaze,
If you were to hear what she says, she says,
If you heard my pretty
One singing her ditty,
Your bosom would get in a blaze, a blaze.’*

Nevertheless he had business on hand, for he carried a small parcel tucked under his elbow; and in due course he left the harbour-front, and passed along a side-street, until he came to Long Lauchie’s shop, which he entered. Mac-Intyre looked up from his work, the sallow face more sunken and melancholy than ever.

“Good morning, friend Lauchlan,” said the councillor, blithely, as he undid the parcel, producing a pair of dancing shoes. “I’ve a bit job here I wish ye’d do for me. The fact is, once or twice lately, when I’ve been at a little merrymaking, the next day I’ve noticed my toes hurt me round the outside—not that it’s gout or anything of that sort—for I’m a very moderate drinker—though the doctor says I might as well give up beer——”

“Beer,” observed Lauchlan, sadly shaking his head, “beer is a mocker. And moderate drinking, Mr. McFadyen, that’s the worst of auy. That’s the fatal thing. Look at the insurance companies—look at the per centage in favour of the total abstainer——”

“Oh, hang your insurance companies!” cried the councillor. “Listen to me now. I’ve been thinking you could make a bit slit along the side—close to the sole—and it would not be seen if I wore black stockings. Dò you nnderstand? A little bit easement, as it were; for I’m

just desperate disinclined to get a new pair—a new pair of shoes is torture to me for months. Do ye understand, Launchlan—a slit that will not be seen——”

“Oh, yes, yes,” said Long Launchie. He examined the shoes, and carelessly put them aside: it was not a paying job. Then he rose, and as his visitor was leaving, Launchie accompanied him out to the front.

“It’s fine weather,” remarked the shoemaker, as he glanced up and down the pavement.

But of a sudden his countenance underwent an extraordinary change. Amazement first, then terror—abject terror—was in his eyes.

“God help us,” he exclaimed, as he instantly slunk back into the entry, “there’s that woman! Mr. McFadyen, tell her I’m dead!—tell her I’m not living here any more.” And with that he vanished, leaving the councillor not a little bewildered.

There now appeared on the scene a woman rather short of figure, with sharp and angular features, sandy hair, and vindictive grey eyes.

“Was that him? Did I see him?” she demanded of the astonished McFadyen; but she did not wait for an answer: she whisked by him, and went straight into the cobbler’s shop, which was apparently empty. “Where are you, you scoundrel!” she called aloud—looking round at the vacant spaces. “I’m for seeing ye face-to-face this time! No more banishment for me, and living on friends, when there’s a drunken vagabond should be supporting me!”

The councillor had followed her—she was partly addressing him.

“I’ve heard of his goings-on!” she cried. “I’ve heard of his practices! But I’ll see to it that there’s no woman coming about this house—a decent, respectable house it was until I was forced to leave it by that drinking ne’er-do-weel. And just let me find the hussy: my word, I’ll put my ten commandments on her, that will I! And where is he?—where is he?—let me get at him now!”

She marched along the passage; with swift and bodeful steps she ascended the staircase; she flung open the door. But apparently the shoemaker’s apartments, which consisted of a kitchen and bedroom, were tenantless.

"Where are you, you scoundrel!" she called again, in menacing tones. "Let me see ye!—let my ten nails get at ye!"

"My good woman," the councillor protested, "this is entirely reprehensible! If you have a complaint to make, let it be done in order. There's law and civilised custom in this town——"

"Ay, would ye defend him, you old reprobate?" she retorted, furiously. "Ye're as bad as he is, I can see by your looks! Blackgnards both o' ye, that's what ye are!—But ye'll not hinder me!"

From the empty kitchen she swept into the empty bedroom; and there the first object that appeared to attract her attention and her wrath was a small mirror standing on the top of a chest of drawers.

"Ay," she exclaimed, "and has she been decking herself in front of my glass, the brazen trollop?—But she'll deck herself at my glass no more!" She lifted a cane-bottomed chair and with one drive sent the mirror, glass and woodwork and all, into a hundred fragments. "And looking at my pictures too?" the virago screamed in her rage; and this time the legs of the cane-bottomed chair went crashing through a framed and glazed coloured print of St. John the Baptist. "And my ewer—and my soap-dish—and my tumbler——" The work of devastation proceeded apace; the noise was like the falling of tenements during an earthquake; until at length, when nothing breakable had been left, the shoemaker's wife put down the chair in the midst of the ruins, and seated herself on it, a smile of pitiless triumph on her face.

"Let her come now!" she said, with cruel irony. "Let her come and take possession! Maybe she'll deck herself at my glass, and be keeking into my press, and thinking that I'm going to stop at Fort William for ever and ever, and let him and her and their fine jigmaleeries pass by without a word! But maybe she'll not find it so easy now to put on her ribbons in front of my glass——"

"Really—really," said the councillor—who for prudential reasons had remained at the door—"really—if you are Mrs. MacIntyre——"

"If I am Mrs. MacIntyre?" she cried—her small grey

eyes glittering with anger. "Who am I, then, if I am not Mrs. MacIntyre? What do you take me for? Do ye think I am one of the low creatures you and he consort wi'? Away with ye about your business, you old profligate! Here I am; and here I sit; until that man comes home."

But at this point she seemed to change her mind. She rose, seized the chair, and advanced to the door; and when the councillor—only too ready to give her a wide berth—had made way for her on the landing, she proceeded down the staircase and took up a position in the entry.

"Let him try to get into either shop or house," said she, as she planted herself again on the chair. "I'm ready for him. I've had enough of living upon friends, and him spending every penny in the public-houses——"

"Really, Mrs. MacIntyre," said the councillor, as he sidled past her, in order to have free access to the street, "if you consider yourself injured, this is not the proper manner——"

"Away with ye, ye wicked old wretch!" she broke in, scornfully. "You're worse than he is—you're a hundred times worse than he is, or you wouldna' be making excuses for him. But you need not come with your excuses to me. What I want is Lauchlan MacIntyre; and face-to-face will I have him before me, if I wait here till the Judgment-day. Here I am; and here I sit; if he has anything to say to me, I am ready for him."

Confronted by this implacable resolution, the councillor found himself helpless; but indeed he did not feel called upon to interfere further, for he was no particular friend of the shoemaker's. Accordingly, and not unwillingly, he took his leave—reflecting that married life appeared occasionally to have its drawbacks, and wondering by what mysterious means Long Lauchie had managed to escape.

But at this precise moment Long Lauchie had not yet escaped, he was only on the point of escaping. It was not until the wild commotion of the furniture-breaking had subsided—it was not until peace once more reigned in the demolished room—that a black head and yellow visage were slowly and cautiously protruded from under the counterpane of the bed. A careful look round—and the prone

figure of the shoemaker followed. As Lauchie rose to his feet, the last rumblings of the storm were still audible below ; for he could hear his injured wife announcing to the councillor her determination to remain a fixture ; but here, in this little room, a painful stillness prevailed ; the tornado had expended itself, leaving behind it nothing but wreckage and ruin. Lauchlan did not stay to contemplate this lamentable spectacle. For a moment or two he listened intently ; then on tiptoe and stealthily he crossed over to the window ; he listened again ; and presently, and with the greatest wariness, he began to raise the lower sash. One inch—two inches—and there was no creaking. A few inches further—and there was room for him to put out his head and reconnoitre : he perceived that with the aid of a rain-water barrel it was possible for him to reach the ground. So again he raised the window a few inches, and this also was accomplished in blessed silence ; he put one leg over the sill ; its fellow followed ; then the long, lank body ; in a second or so Lauchlan's feet were resting on the solid wooden covering of the water-butt. From thence he dropped into the yard ; he scrambled over the stone wall ; he pursued his way swiftly along the lane until he gained a side-street ; and there he found safe haven in a public-house with which he seemed to be familiar.

"A glass of whisky, Mr. Pattison," he gasped—for these un wonted exertions had rendered him breathless.

"But what have ye done with your hat, Mr. MacIntyre ?" said the publican, as he proceeded to get the cordial.

Then Lauchlan remembered that he had nothing on his head save its natural covering.

"Oh," said he, uneasily, "the—the wind blew it away. But I'm sure you'll be lending me one, Mr. Pattison, until I get home."

And then it sadly occurred to him that for him there was no returning home, while that fearful being barred the way ; and in his perplexity and helplessness he resolved upon confessing the truth to Mr. Pattison.

"No," said he, "I will not tell you any lies. And the fact is, Mr. Pattison, that I have ran awch from the house, for my wife is there, and raging like a she-duyvle, and ahl

the furniture brokken, and I do not know what more she would be doing if I went back."

"Well, that is a pretty pass!" said the sympathising publican. "Ye'll have to take Sandy the policeman with ye, and drive her out."

"Sandy?—the lad Sandy?" remonstrated the shoemaker, in accents of reproach. "The poor lad!—could I ask him to face a raging teeger like that?"

"And what will you do, then?" was the next question.

"Ay, that is what I am not knowing myself," answered Lauchlan, with something of a melancholy air; and thereupon, having borrowed a hat from Mr. Pattison, he set out once more on his travels.

Now it happened during his subsequent wanderings from one howff to another that the homeless shoemaker encountered Niall Gorach; and it occurred to him that he could not do better than engage the half-witted youth to go and pry about and discover whether Mrs. MacIntyre had as yet taken it into her head to vacate the premises. When Niall had been got to understand what was wanted, he went off; but on his return his report was discouraging; the "wumman" was still in the entry seated on a chair. The disconsolate shoemaker now took Niall with him as the only companion that was available; and as a few glasses of whisky, taken at various points and stages, had made him communicative, not to say amiably garrulous, he described to the lad the unhappy predicament in which he was placed.

"It is I that could drive her out of the house," said Niall, in a darkly meditative manner. He spoke in Gaelic.

"You?" rejoined the shoemaker, in the same tongue, and he was laughing now and very merry. "Oh, yes, it is your head that has the sense in it, and no mistake! And do you know what she would do to you, my fine boy?—she would eat you at a mouthful! Oh, yes, you are the grand one to drive her out of the house!—"

"What will you give me?—will you give me a sixpence?" said Niall, paying no heed to his playful irony.

"But before I give you a sixpence, or the half of a sixpence," said the shoemaker, with contemptuous mirth, "maybe you would be for telling me how you are going near her? Niall, my fine lad, you do not know what that kind

of a woman is, or twenty hundred sixpences would be no temptation for you——”

“As soon as it is dark,” said Niall Gorach, doggedly, “it is I that could drive her out, if there is a back way into the house.”

“And how would you do it, my noble hero—how would you do it?” he asked—but he was fumbling about in his pocket for a match.

“I would show her the Prince,” said Niall, with his elfin eyes peering upwards to his companion’s face.

Long Lauchie only laughed and giggled the more.

“It’s little you understand, my brave youth, what kind of a woman that is. Aw, Dycea, she would eat you at a mouthful! Do you think I would allow it?—no, not if Sandy the policeman went with you——”

“Will you give me the sixpence?” said Niall: and then he added, in a mysterious whisper: “I would show her Prince Beelzebub; and anyone that is seeing him will go mad. There was a man at Taynult that struck me with a whip; and one night Prince Beelzebub went to see him, and he was ill in bed for more than a week after it. Maybe—well, maybe he was not for striking me with a whip during that week.”

The shoemaker began to show a little more attention, though he was still incredulous and vaguely amused.

“Now what is the witch’s cantrip you would be after, you limb of Satan!” he exclaimed. “Well I know there are queer things get into that noddle of yours; but sure I am, my famous warrior, that you would make the greatest mistake of your life if you tried to go near the she-devil that is in my house. Niall, my son, I will tell you the truth, and this is the truth—that when she is in the inside of the dwelling, the outside of the dwelling is the best place.”

Niall was still stealthily and eagerly scrutinising his companion’s features; but the fact is that Long Lauchie seemed now too vacuously happy to pay much heed to anything. It was his search after a match that chiefly concerned him. There even appeared some probability that he would forget all about his wife being in possession of his home.

"It is not the head of a man," continued Niall, still 'glowering' and watchful, "that Prince Beelzebub has on him, but it is something more terrible than any head, and there are two eyes, and the light is on them——"

"Oh, yes, yes," said the shoemaker, contemptuously, "and it is a wise lad you are to think of frightening people with a hollowed turnip and a candle." Then of a sudden some idea seemed to strike him. "Niall," said he, in an undertone, and his bemused eyes were mirthful now, "could you give that devil of a woman a fearful fright? Could you now? Is that your intention? For if you do it well, I will pay you not one sixpence but two sixpences, and that as sure as death. Will you make her jump? Will you make her spring out of her senses? Niall, you are the son of my heart! Will you make her fly? Will you make her scream? Aw, Dyeca, it would be worth a hundred pounds to see her jumping with terror!"

"If there is a back way into the house," said Niall, slowly, "the Prince could get at her——"

"There is—there is!" said Lauchlan, in great excitement. "There is the rain barrel—and the window I left open—Niall, will you make her jump?—will she scream out, do you think?—it is I that would be laughing, if I could hide somewhere on the other side of the street——"

"Give me one of the sixpences now," said Niall, regarding him furtively. "Maybe I will have to offer something to the Prince."

Lauchlan put his hand in his pocket.

"And mind you this, you imp of a warlock," said he, "if it is lies you are telling me I will break every bone in your body."

It was some two hours thereafter, as the twilight was deepening into dark, that Niall Gorach cautiously clambered over the wall of Long Lauchie's backyard, and crossed to the rain barrel, and ascended to the open window. Between his teeth he held the end of a piece of string; and when he had reached the sill, and peered into the room to make sure no one was there, he noiselessly hauled up after him a bundle to which the cord was attached. The demolished apartment was now shrouded deep in gloom; and a profound silence prevailed. In this ghostly stillness

Niall began to undo his bundle ; and not a whisper of a sound betrayed his presence.

About ten minutes or a quarter of an hour later there emerged on to the landing one of the most extraordinary apparitions that the sick brain of any mortal creature ever conceived. It was a figure of more than normal height, draped entirely in black, the shoulders, or what might pass for shoulders, square, the two extended arms bearing each a lighted candle. But the astonishing and alarming feature of this phenomenon was that instead of having anything like a human head on its square shoulders, the head was that of some owl-like animal ; and the two eyes, each in its hollow recess, caught the light of the candles, and seemed to burn with some infernal flame. This hideous and ghastly manifestation now proceeded to descend the stairway, not even a rustle of the black drapery giving notice of its approach ; and when within two steps of the foot it paused.

“Pentateuch !—Pentateuch !” said a mournful voice.

There was a woman sitting in the dusk of the passage. At this sound she turned her head ; the next moment, with a wild scream of terror, she had sprang to her feet ; the next moment, with shriek after shriek—and shriek after shriek—she had fled into the outer air, and was blindly rushing down the street, as if all the fiends of pandemonium were after her. She did not seem to know whither she was going ; she waited for no answer to her piercing cries ; to get away from this horrible, unnameable, appalling thing was her only aim. And meanwhile Long Lauchlan the shoemaker, hidden in the friendly shelter of a door over the way, was slapping his thighs, and shaking and laughing with inextinguishable laughter.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI.

ON one of these evenings Mrs. Maclean was as usual in the little parlour, seated in her easy-chair, and placidly knitting, and Jess, at the central table, was engaged with her business accounts, when Barbara, dressed up in all her finery, appeared at the partially opened door. After a single glance round the room, she seemed to hesitate about an excuse for withdrawing again.

"I was just looking in—" she said.

"And finding nobody," suggested the little widow, with sly sarcasm.

This was something of a challenge; and Barbara at once went into the parlour, and sate down.

"Not but that we're rather dull company," the widow continued, "for there's not so many coming about as there used to be. The lad Allan I can understand; he is busy with his classes; and right glad am I that he is getting on so well. But Ogilvie—what have ye been doing to Johnnie Ogilvie, Barbara? They tell me he paid ye great attention at the ball of the Gaelic Choir; and he used to look in of an evening pretty regular; but now one hears or sees nothing of him——"

"And perhaps it is better I should hear or see nothing of him," said Barbara, sharply, "if there is to be such a work about my taking a cup of tea at Cowal Ferry!"

"I did not know there was any such work made," rejoined the widow, with her customary good-humour, "though a young lass cannot be too careful about appearances." She looked up from her knitting, and scanned the girl's costume for a moment. "But are ye sure you were not expecting any one, Barbara? You're finely decked out, to be merely going down the town on an errand or two. In my young days I would not have thought of putting on a hat and feathers if I was only going for a can of mulattoes to flavour the rice for supper——"

"Mother," interposed Jess, glancing up from her accounts,

"you may have what you like ; but rice flavoured with mulattoes will be no supper for me. Is it molasses you mean ? "

"Yes, just that," the widow proceeded, cheerfully. "And has there been a quarrel between you and Ogilvie, Barbara ? And are you thinking to fetch him back with a hat and feathers ? Well, well : Every one must have her own way of managing her sweetheart. When I was young they used to say 'Goat's milk and sweet violets to wash your face with ; and there's not a king's son in the world but then will be running after you.'"

"Perhaps I am not wishing for any sweetheart," said Barbara, sullenly.

"And yet," observed Mrs. Maclean, her eyes demurely bent on her work, "and yet you took a present—and a very handsome present—from Allan Henderson."

"Allan Henderson ?" retorted Barbara. "I do not care to have anything to do with him and his ill-temper."

But at this Jess Maclean fired up.

"Ill-temper ?" said she. "And what do you mean by ill-temper ? If to have scorn and contempt for meanness, and cunning, and despicable things generally, if that is to be ill-tempered, then he is ill-tempered, but not in any other way. Allan Henderson is a man who has his own opinions, his own character, his own standards of what is worth seeking for ; he is not a mere copy and echo of other people ; and if he does not strive to please, and say pretty things, I respect him all the more for it. Striving to please !—any empty-headed coxcomb can do that——"

"Oh, yes, you are always on the side of the school-master !" Barbara said, tauntingly ; and at that Jess Maclean's fair and freckled face became suffused with colour, and she was proudly silent. The widow did not notice this confusion ; she had returned to the subject of sweethearts ; and she was relating the story of the northern maiden whose lover, on the eve of their wedding, was drowned at sea : how the girl pined away and died, her last request being that she also should have an ocean grave ; how her relatives refused, preferring that she should be buried in the churchyard of a neighbouring island ; how, on their setting sail, they encountered a dreadful storm that

they interpreted as a warning from Heaven ; and how, when they at length carried out her wishes and consigned the corpse to the deep, the phantom of her lover was seen to arise from the waves and clasp her in his arms. It is an old and familiar tale that has been told round many a peat fire ; but Babara had not heard it ; and she listened to it with the entranced eyes of a child.

The narrative had hardly been finished when there was a tapping at the door, and the next moment the tall and spare form of the young schoolmaster appeared. He looked startled, almost dismayed, when he perceived that Barbara was seated there ; but no escape was possible for him ; for in an instant the little widow had dashed aside her work, and ran to him, and caught him by one hand, while with the other, as she dragged him into the room, she patted him affectionately on the shoulder.

“Welcome indeed to the hearth, as they say in the Gaelic,” she cried. “Allan, my lad, I never see you but I feel that blood is thicker than water ; and it is only a few minutes ago I was talking of your absence ; though some would say I should not complain since it is plenty of work that has been keeping you away. And here is your own chair, that always looks empty when you are not here ; and you will light your pipe now, and give us your news ; for though Jessie is always telling us of the great things you are doing and going to do, sure I am you will not show yourself proud and forgetful of your own people. And I hope the classes are getting bigger and bigger, and the boys keeping obedient——”

“Oh, yes,” said Jess, with a laugh. “Allan is a fine one to be teaching those young lads the humanities ! It is much of the humanities they are likely to learn ! I know the humanities they are likely to have set before them—impatience, and browbeating, and contempt of the whole of the rest of the civilised world——”

“You’ve never a good word for me, Jessie,” said he, as he took his seat.

“And that’s true—that’s true !” interposed her mother, quickly. “She never has a good word for you—before your face, Allan ; but behind your back—you should just hear her ! Behind your back—that’s another story ! Was it

ten minutes since, was it as much as ten minutes since she was defending you, and praising you, and telling us how you were different from other people, and everything splendid, and just the one single person in the world to be admired. Oh, yes," continued the garrulous little widow, in her terrible indiscretion, and now she had turned upon Jess, "yes, yes, you may show as much pink in your face as ye like; but when my cousin's son comes to the house, I will see that he is treated with proper civility——"

"I am sure I have little to complain of," Allan said. "Jessie and I understand each other pretty well, I think."

"Will you take a cup of tea now, Allan?" the widow asked.

"I should be glad of it," he made answer, "if it is not too much trouble." And thereupon Mrs. Maclean rose and went to the cupboard: she was delighted that the stiff-necked young man had condescended to accept something at her hands.

All this while he had hardly dared to look Barbara's way; though his whole being was conscious of her presence, and thrilled in response to it; he knew that her eyes, pitiless though they might be, were possibly, even by chance, wandering in his direction. And by subtle degrees the magnetism of this mere proximity had again got hold of him with all its accustomed and mysterious force; his obduracy melted; he was ready to forgive her everything bygone—her open preference of another, her bitter words and taunts—if only there was a hope of his winning a friendly look from under the beautiful, long lashes. And it seemed so easy and reasonable for her to be kind. Surely one so bountifully gifted by nature ought to have been grateful to the existing fabric of things, and ready to do a good turn anywhere? How could one so graciously formed be so merciless and cold and distant? Nay, in what inscrutable way did she continue to exercise this irresistible allurements and glamour, if her attitude towards him was intentionally repellent?

"Here, Barbara," said the light-hearted little widow, "take off your black hat and feathers, and not sit there like a tragedy empress. Get out the cups and saucers; and Jess—away wi' those books o' yours. 'It's a' to pleasure our

guidman : ' he'll be somebody's guidman all in good time ; and I trust she'll treat him well after such thankless work as teaching a lot of idle laddies."

"No, no, you must not say that," Allan protested. "The school-work during the day may be tiresome enough, and thankless enough ; but as for my own lads that come to me in the evening, I am just proud of them. I had no idea that in a small place like Duntroone there would be so many worthy young fellows determined on self-improvement in spite of their poor and hard circumstances. Where they get time to prepare their tasks I cannot imagine, unless they snatch an hour or two in the early morning, before going to their desk or the counter. And well-behaved in their manner, too——"

"They'd better be ! " said Jess spitefully.

"—civil, and attentive, and anxious to win approval. Poor lads," he continued, with a bit of a sigh, and he appeared to relapse into a profound reverie, "one cannot but sympathise with their ambition ; but if they only knew how little a knowledge of books will avail them when they come to live their lives—when they come to discover how inexorable fate is—and how hopeless and cross-grained the world is——"

"Now I'll not have ye talk like that, Allan ! " the widow exclaimed. "I'll not have ye give way to your black moods—though it's but natural, living in such a solitary fashion, and not coming among your friends as much as ye ought. See, try what this will do for you—and a slice or two of cake——"

He paid little attention. His prematurely-lined forehead remained dark and meditative ; until Jess—whose keen grey eyes could read his face as if it were a book—thought fit to interfere. She said to him, with frank good-nature—

"Come, now, Allan, listen to me, and I will tell you something. Your evening classes promise so well that they will soon become an institution ; and there is one thing an institution cannot do without, and that is an annual soir  e. The young men will invite their friends, and their sisters, and sweethearts ; and there will be addresses and songs ; and a report in the newspaper, so that your classes will be recognised as one of the established institutions of Duntroone——"

"Indeed, you can talk common-sense when you like, Jess," her mother said, approvingly, "if ye would not keep bickering at Allan, poor lad. Just a fine advertisement—a fine advertisement to help him in the public notice—most useful—most useful—for if I may say so, Allan, ye're just a little bit inclined to be reserved and unmanageable——"

"A little bit inclined!" said Jess, with a laugh; but immediately she added: "Well, now, Allan, if you think such a thing would be liked by the lads themselves, you might have the first *soirée* before the summer vacation."

"It's not much of a vacation my youths will expect, or want," the schoolmaster answered her, and he roused himself somewhat. "They are too anxious and eager to get on. I hear now and again of some of their schemes and enterprises—most of them translations and useless things they could never get published, if they had any desire of that kind. But happily there do not seem to be many of them aiming at a literary career; I hope none of them, indeed; that will be one disappointment the less for them, on their way through the world——"

"Your article on the German Folk-songs," said Jess, skilfully intervening, "when will that be published?"

"It is not a subject of much importance," he made answer; "they may hold it over for any length of time. Mr. McFadyen seems more impatient about it than I am."

"I think all of us," said Jess, with her gentle grey eyes glistening with pride and pleasure. "I think all of us will be interested enough when that number comes out!"

It was now about time for the schoolmaster to be getting along to his Latin class; and as he rose to take his leave, the warm-hearted little widow was urgent in her entreaties that he should come oftener to see them. The strange thing was that Barbara, who had barely spoken a word during the visit, and hardly seemed to regard herself as one of the company, rose also, and said that she too would be going. Of course he could not assume that she was leaving with him—that he was even to be allowed to hold the door open for her. When he had bade good-bye to the others, he bade good-bye to her; and she coldly and formally gave him her hand. And then he passed through the shop and out into the lamp-lit street: he was on his way home, alone.

He had not gone a dozen yards when he heard light and swift footsteps behind him.

“Mr. Henderson !”

The voice startled him ; he turned instantly ; and then some wild, bewildering hope flashed through his brain. Had she relented ? Had her heart softened after all ? Was he now to take her and claim her as his own ? Why was she advancing towards him—here in the magical dusk—if all the possibilities of all the world were not wrapped up in that slim and elegant figure ?

It was but a momentary madness that possessed him. Just behind him there was one of the street-lamps ; and the dull light it shed upon her features showed all too clearly that it was no compassion, no kindness, that had moved her to this sudden act. The tone of her voice, when she spoke, gave the final deathblow to that distracting fancy.

“I wish to know something from you,” she said, rather breathlessly, and yet with obvious determination. “We—we had some talk about Mr. Ogilvie. And you threatened. What is it you have said or done to him ? Something has happened : what is it that has happened ? Why does he keep away ? It is through you. I know it is through you. What is it you have done ?”

He stood irresolute. Even with her face cruel, she looked so winsome ! And then to be alone with her—when he could seize both her hands, and hold her, and tell her at last what was in his burning heart. But then again came the despairing consciousness that it was all in vain ; her voice was angry and menacing ; her demeanour was a challenge.

“Whatever I did, Barbara,” he said, quite humbly, “it was through no wish to injure you : it was far different from that.”

“And who asked you to intermeddle ?” she demanded, with her lips grown pale. “And who made you the judge ? Who gave you the right to say what would injure me or not injure me ?”

“I told you, Barbara,” he said, gently. “I told you that I could not stand by and see you being led into a false position through your ignorance of the world. Do you know what people would say——”

"I do not care what people would say!" she broke in, sullenly.

"Then it is for your friends," said he, with something more of firmness, "if you are so wilful, it is for your friends to see that this man Ogilvie will not take advantage of your recklessness——"

"What did you do?" she broke in again. "What have you done? Why does he keep away from us? It is owing to you—it is you that have done it—well I know that!"

"He can best tell you himself," Henderson said, calmly, "why he keeps away from you. But a young woman would be more regardful of her character who did not show herself so anxious about the visits of a young man."

"My character is my own," said she, hotly, "and I do not wish for friends that have bad suspicions, and that interfere where they are not wanted. I do not wish for such friends. And if you will not tell me what has happened, then I will find out for myself. Yes, indeed! I will get some one to help me—but not your help—I can do without that! If you have said anything to him in my name, I will find it out; and if you have done anything to him, I will find someone who will take my part—but not you—not you!"

There were some people coming along the almost deserted pavement: she turned from him without another word, and disappeared into the dusk. And then he made his way home—to those busy and eager lads whose confident and courageous interest in the future lying before them was such a beautiful thing, with its touch of sadness too.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DARK DEALINGS.

ONE morning Barbara Maclean was up on the top of the Gallows Hill, and she was regarding with fixed gaze a small and faintly-red speck that was slowly creeping into this wide panorama of aerial blues and greys. It was the funnel of the *Aros Castle*, that was now on her way across from the Sound of Mull to Duntroone; and as she came along by Lismore light, the dim spot of red gradually took definite shape and brightened in hue, while the black hull of the steamer was now visible amid the waste of waves. Onwards she came—past the Maiden Island—past the end of Kerrara—under the ivied ruins of the Castle—and through the smooth waters of the bay; and by the time she had got in to the South Pier, been made fast there, and discharged her passengers and cargo, Barbara had descended from her lofty pinnacle, and was proceeding along the harbour-front with apparent unconcern, carelessly glancing at the railway-trucks, the lorries, and the herring barrels. This is not the part of Duntroone ordinarily chosen by young ladies out for a morning walk; nevertheless she seemed bent on no very precise errand; while there was something of a holiday look about her attire.

Ogilvie, his work finished for the moment, had stepped ashore, and was now standing talking to an acquaintance. When Barbara drew near, he glanced towards her with some little surprise; then he raised his cap; evidently he assumed that she would continue on her way. But when she paused, hesitated, and seemed inclined to address him, he at once dismissed his companion, and turned to her.

“It is some time since,” she said, slowly, “it is some time since you have been to see us.” Her eyes were down-cast, and she was nervously smoothing the forefinger of her glove.

“I have been rather busy,” he said, evasively.

“I was thinking,” said she, “I was thinking—if there was any reason.”

“Oh, nothing particular—nothing particular,” he made

answer. There was no shyness about him, at all events : he was contentedly scanning the various articles of her costume.

For a second she was silent ; then she ventured to raise her eyes, the better to question him.

“ Was Allan Henderson—speaking to you ? ”

At this he laughed rather uneasily.

“ Well, yes, we had a few words, by way of a joke. Only the joke might have had a bad ending ; for both of us were precious near rolling over the edge of the Castle hill.”

“ Was there a fight ? ” she demanded, with breathless eagerness.

“ A fight ? No. But there was a scrimmage—a ridiculous scrimmage. A fuss about nothing. If I may be allowed to say so, Miss Barbara, I’m afraid your friends are just a little bit too officious ! ”

There was something of a taunt in this last phrase, notwithstanding the assumed indifference of the speaker. As for her, her cheeks were burning hot with resentment : her surmises had been only too clearly confirmed.

“ Yes,” she went on, in bitter indignation, “ it is what you say—my friends are a good deal too officious. What right have they to interfere on my account ? What right has Allan Henderson to meddle with anything that concerns me ? Let him keep to his school. He is not my master. I am not in any of his classes——”

“ But, really, really,” said he, with abundant goodhumour, “ it is not a matter to make any worry about. It is of no consequence one way or the other. It is a trifle——”

“ I will not have anyone speaking for me—any one that has not the right to do it,” she continued, with the beautiful lucent eyes grown sullen with wrath. “ And what was it he said ? Yes, I guessed that he was going from me to you—I have been thinking of it—I am sure he would be doing that. And now I want to know what it was he said——”

The Purser smiled tolerantly.

“ Don’t you bother yourself about nothing, Miss Barbara,” said he. “ Things are very well as they are : are they not ? I for one am perfectly satisfied.”

She regarded him boldly.

"If I were a man," said she, "I would not let another man frighten me away from any house."

He winced under this reproach; but all the same he answered her with a sufficiently confident air—

"No, no, Miss Barbara: it isn't that at all. There's not a man in Duntroone, or anywhere else, would keep me away from any house that I wished to visit——"

"Then why——"

"Then why have I not been looking in of late to see you and your folks?" he said, anticipating her question; and then he proceeded, carelessly: "Oh, well, I hate fuss and disturbance. I'm for a quiet life. There's no use in seeking trouble when you can avoid it. It isn't worth while. I don't see the object——"

She appeared to withdraw a little; and her manner changed.

"Oh, of course; I understand," she said stiffly and proudly. "If it is not worth while, why should you come to see us? If there is no object, I can very well understand. And it is much better as it is——"

"Besides, as I tell you, I have been busy," he added, with something of apology in his tone.

"Oh, yes, I understand," she said. "I understand very well. And as you say, it is of little consequence. Good morning, Mr. Ogilvie!"

She was for moving away when he intercepted her.

"One moment, Miss Barbara," said he, as if rather deprecating her displeasure. "You have never fixed yet when you are coming for a sail with us. We spoke of it before—your going up to Tobermory—and staying the night with Mrs. Maclean's friends—and coming back with us the next day. The weather appears quite settled at present; and I would see that you were well looked after——"

"I am very much obliged to you," said she, in the same stiff and cold fashion. "But before I could do that, you would have to come and ask permission for me from Mrs. Maclean: and as she lives in a house that you dare not come near, there is no possibility of it."

He flushed red with vexation.

"I can go near any house that I choose to go near," he said, shortly.

"Oh, well, indeed now that is a good thing," she rejoined, with great coolness. "For it is a pity that any one should be afraid to come near the house of a friend." And with another formal word of farewell, she turned from him and walked away, resolute and apparently unconcerned. She even made a show of opening the small leathern reticule she carried, as if to refresh her memory about her next errand ; but her fingers shook so that she could hardly undo the clasp.

Some little time thereafter, on her way home, Barbara called in at the shop to leave a message ; and there she found Jessie Maclean talking across the counter to Niall Gorach. When Barbara entered, Jess looked up and laughed.

"Now is your chance, Barbara," said she. "Here is Niall that offers to take me to a wonderful spae-wife——"

"And what is that ?" Barbara asked.

"A spae-wife—a wise woman—who will tell you whether you are going to marry a prince or a chimney-sweep. She will tell you everything that is to happen to you, and perhaps something more. Well, now, I have no curiosity about myself ; I am content to be as I am ; but you—I'm thinking you might want to know the strange and fine things that are to come your way. Though I am not sure that it is safe, Barbara : you might see too much, and lose your senses——"

Niall was looking from the one to the other of them. At last he said to Jess—

"It was you that was keeping the man from striking me ; and besides I got a suxpence ; and I was to show you the white stag in Creannoch. But that is a long weh aweh. Mebbe you would come to the wise woman ; and I will see that the policeman is not noticing anything——"

Barbara stared at him and listened, in silence. And without a word—as if this chance proposal were a matter of complete indifference to her—she left the shop. But a few minutes afterwards, when Niall Gorach was going along the street, he found himself overtaken.

"Have you the Gaelic ?" said a voice close to him.

"Yes, indeed," he answered in that tongue, as he turned and beheld Barbara Maclean confronting him : no doubt in his eyes she seemed a grand and noble lady, with her fine hat and feathers.

"Will you take me to the wise woman?" she said, hurriedly.

The half-witted lad regarded her with slow suspicion.

"What you do not do to-day, you will not repent to-morrow: that is what they are always saying to me," he replied.

"But I am Jessie Maclean's cousin, and you are very friendly with her," continued Barbara. "And besides that, I will be giving you something."

Still he hesitated.

"You would have to go after it is dark," said he.

"I will go at any time," she responded eagerly. "Tell me where I am to meet you."

"And you will not be speaking of it to anyone?" he asked of her, with cautious and peering eyes.

"As sure as the Good Being lives, not a word will I pass to any person."

This seemed at length to pacify him; and, after a glance up and down the thoroughfare, he told her when and where she should find him. Then Barbara hurried off home, for Mrs. Maclean would soon be coming over for her mid-day meal. The little widow, when she did appear, found her niece more pre-occupied and silent even than usual: she did not know that the girl, trembling at her own temerity, had it in mind to lay an impious hand on the veil of the future.

At the appointed hour, when darkness had fallen and the street lamps were lit, Barbara stole out and along to the rendezvous, her finery being now all discarded for a thick tartan plaid which she wore round her head and shoulders, and with which she could pretty effectually conceal her face. Niall was awaiting her.

"Does the woman—does the wise woman—ever do anyone harm?" Barbara asked of her companion as they set forth—and she spoke in an undertone.

"You will have to give her money," was the reply.

"Will you come into the house with me?" she asked again, timidly.

"No. I will be on the outside. And if I see the officer, I will let you have warning. But it is a very secret place, and perhaps they will not be observing anything."

He led the way towards a back slum in the poorer part of the town ; and there, with all sorts of stealthy precautions against being remarked, he brought her to the mouth of a 'close' or entry, and whispered to her to go in. As for himself, he seemed at the same moment to vanish. Barbara, thus thrown on her own resources, did advance a step or two ; but the place was pitch dark ; and it is probable that in her vague apprehension she would have retreated and got into the open air again, but that suddenly a hand was laid upon her arm. She shrieked in terror.

"Be quiet—be still—ye're safe enough," said a woman's voice. "I'll show ye the way."

Hardly knowing what was happening to her, she suffered herself to be led by this unknown grasp ; she was conducted along a narrow passage ; she was warned about the descent of some steps ; she found herself in a stone-paved court ; and then a door was opened, and presently she knew that she had come into some confined space. The next moment her guide struck a match and proceeded to light a candle ; and Barbara, looking around with bewildered eyes, discovered that she was in a low-roofed cellar-looking place that was apparently empty, while her companion turned out to be a little old woman of slatternly appearance and unkempt grey hair. The ancient witch now shut the door behind them, and fixed the candle on to the wall.

"There will be no one to disturb us," she said, after a swift and cunning scrutiny of the features of her visitor. "And if anything should appear—there in the middle of the floor—you will mind not to give a cry."

At these words the figure of the girl began to shiver slightly.

"I am not wishing for anything to appear," she said, in a low voice.

"Maybe there will no—maybe there will no," the crone proceeded, as she began to get out the implements of her craft. "But at least I can tell ye some things that's before you ; and that I can do because I have read the Book of the Law ; ay, and I have heard the Voice ; and open now is all that was shut, and shut is all that was open. Be attentive now—the time is at hand."

What followed—the palmistry, the divination by cards,

and the like—was of the most poor and paltry description ; that is to say, the old beldame's tricks and pretences would have appeared tawdry and commonplace to a landward-bred girl, who would have regarded them with a mixture of laughing incredulity and curiosity, the incredulity predominating ; but Barbara had been brought up in a lonely island, with moaning seas around, and the awful silence of the starlight nights ; and her imaginative and impressionable temperament yielded readily to a fear of the supernatural. The gibberish the old woman talked was to her something terrible and strange ; the mysterious hints of what was in store for her were communications from the unseen ; it needed no caldrons with green flames, nor spectral figures, nor pentagrams with phantom goats to convince her that these blurred glimpses into the future were true. Nay, in her tremulous agitation she almost seemed to think that this revealer of coming events had some power of control over them.

“No, no !—he's not to be away for so many years !” she exclaimed, piteously. “Don't say that ! He may change his mind. He may find enough attraction at home. Not for years and years——”

“But, as I tell ye, there's a lady in the ploy,” continued the hag, and she shuffled the dirty bits of pasteboard again, and affected to be examining them profoundly. “Ay, indeed, a grand lady, and richly dressed. And what is a tartan shawl against a velvet gown ?——”

“But I have better than a tartan shawl !” said Barbara, quickly. I only put on the plaid to hide my face in the street. I have far finer things—it need not be for that he will go away and stay away for years. Is there not enough attraction at home, that he should be going away ? What will I do, then, that he is not to go away ?”

“But the dark sweetheart—you have been thinking of him as well ?” said the withered beldame, watching her prey by the dull light of the solitary candle.

“Him !” said the girl, with unguarded vehemence. “It is nothing but mischief he has been doing, coming between us ! No, no, do not tell me about him—do not waste time—tell me about the other one ! How many years is he to be away ? He will forget all about me !——”

"Well, well, now," said the ferret-eyed old woman, insidiously, "but there's the rich old gentleman you have the chance of——"

"I would rather be dead!" Barbara broke in, passionately.

"Ay, ay, but carriages and horses are fine things, and ribbons and satins. You will come to me again now, and bring me a little more money; and I will tell ye about the rich old gentleman, and the estate, and the grand pew in the church——"

"I would rather be dead!—I would rather be dead!" the girl cried—out of her mind with this torture of hopes and fears. "Tell me about the other one—about the fair one: how many years is he to be away?—and maybe he will not go if he finds enough attraction at home? What is it that will keep him? What am I to do? Are you sure that he is going? He never said that to me. Only that he was not satisfied, as many a young man is not satisfied, and wishing for better opportunities——"

There was a tapping at the door. The old witch instantly blew out the light.

"There's a policeman at the corner," Niall Gorach whispered in to them, in Gaelic, "and it is I that am thinking he is on the watch for us. Well, now, if he comes here, as soon as he puts his foot on the steps, I will trip him up; and you must run——"

"No, no!" exclaimed Barbara, in still further alarm. "I cannot do that. Every one will know. Will I give him money?—I have still a little——"

"Give it to me!" said the beldame, eagerly. "Give it to me—and I will make him quiet——"

"May the devil eat you!" growled Niall Gorach, using a familiar Gaelic imprecation. "If you take another penny of her money, it is I that will make your life too hard to be borne. I will put more wild beasts into your house than you ever saw in a pack of cards. Now be still—and maybe the officer will go by."

They stood silent and unseen by each other in the dark, Barbara hardly daring to breathe. And then, after a little while, Niall Gorach crept away from the cellar, and ascended the steps, and passed out to the front: he returned

with the welcome intelligence that the coast was clear—Barbara was free to go. A second or two thereafter the shawled figure was again passing swiftly along the thoroughfare—her face concealed from the light of the lamps—and many a wild fancy claiming possession of her brain.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RED PARASOL.

“I AM of opeenion,” said the councillor, seated in Mrs. Maclean’s back-parlour, and giving himself considerable airs before the women-folk, “I am of opeenion that in human life there’s a great deal to be done with imagination. For example, now, when I want to go to sleep at night—and if there’s a grander thing in the world than a sound night’s rest, I don’t know where you’ll find it—when I want to get to sleep, I double up the pillow to give a rounded edge to it, and then I put my cheek quietly and softly on it, and then I try to imagine that my head is a golf ball placed on the tee : not a ball among prickly whins, nor a ball in a cart-rut, nor a ball in a puddle o’ water, but a ball carefully and gently and securely placed on the tee——”

“Ay,” said Jess, “and do ye never dream that it’s sent whirling into the air with one o’ they heavy clubs ?”

“Na, na,” he responded, sily. “By the time it comes to dreaming I’m dreaming of something quite different. It’s the getting to sleep is the question, and that’s where imagination steps in, and does the trick. Talking of golf-balls,” he went on, “the new links are nearly completed ; and when they’re open, Miss Jessie, I want you and Miss Barbara to come and look on at another match between me and Jamie Gilmour. Ye see, I had rather bad luck the last time——” He stopped ; and then proceeded again, with a sudden burst of honesty : “No, I’ll not say that. I will not say that. If a man can beat me at golf, he can beat me ; and there’s an end of it. I cannot do better than my best. Dod bless me, I see people worrying and worrying

because they're not equal to their neighbours ! there's no philosophy in that—no philosophy——”

“ I'm sure, Mr. McFadyen,” observed the polite little widow, “ there's few can beat ye at golf, or at anything else.”

“ Well,” said the councillor, modestly, “ I'm not saying but that I try to keep myself up to the mark. And maybe I'll show Jamie something on the new links. I've been over the ground. I've been studying the bunkers. I think I can see my way to make a fight of it—if Gilmour does not put me out wi' that cackling laugh of his——”

At this point Barbara made her appearance, and he instantly jumped to his feet to shake hands with her and to pull in a chair for her.

“ I thought I saw you this morning,” he said, with adroit flattery, “ for there was a young lady going down the street before me that had a very elegant figure and was nicely dressed, and thinks I to myself ‘ If that's not Miss Barbara, I'm a Dutchman ! ’ But when I got nearer I discovered who she was—it was one of the Miss Murrays of Inveruran—the younger daughter, I think——”

Barbara's face flushed with pleasure : the Murrays of Inveruran were great people in those parts, the ladies of the family being quite the leaders of fashion.

“ It was her red parasol that had hidden her face,” explained the councillor. “ And I will say this,” he continued, with an air of conviction, “ that any young lady that carries a scarlet parasol does nothing more nor less than confer a favour on every one coming within sight of her. And I will just explain to ye now why a red parasol should be such a beautiful thing, and grateful to the eye. What is the general colour of the earth ? It's green. And what is the complementary colour of green ? It's red. And that's the reason of the harmony—that's why the eye welcomes it—Dod, I tell ye that a brilliant red parasol, on the dullest day ye like, looks to me just like a blaze o' summer, though the young lady may be only standing on the pavement and looking in at McLennan's windows.”

Barbara had been listening intently—in silence ; but the widow said—

“ It's very clever of yon, Mr. McFadyen, to understand the meaning of such things.”

“No, no,” he responded, with some touch of deprecation, “only there’s a why and a wherefore to everything, and one is none the worse for being aware of it.”

It was a few days after this that Barbara was again waiting and watching for the *Aros Castle*—this time from the rocky promontory underneath the Gallows Hill. In addition to her ordinary attire, she had a shawl hanging over her arm, though the warmth of early summer was now in the air; while there could be little fear of rain on such a morning, for sea and sky were alike of a faultless blue, while the hills of Mull and Morven and Kingairloch had that peculiar remoteness and aerial quality that tells of settled fine weather. And it was into this world of shining azure that the red speck of a funnel eventually and slowly made its way; until, as the ship drew nearer and nearer, the throb of her paddles could be heard, echoing up among the ruins of Duntroone Castle. Then she churned her way across the smooth waters of the harbour; she was made fast alongside the quay; and the work of discharging passengers and cargo began.

Barbara lingered and still lingered out on the rocks; and when anyone chanced to pass—for there was a boatbuilder’s shed down at the shore—she would leisurely walk a few steps one way or another, as though she were entirely engrossed with the seaward view. But by-and-bye she turned her back on that brilliant picture; she left the rocks; she went along by the fishermen’s cottages; and now before her was the South Pier, with the *Aros Castle* lying idle, though there were still a few stragglers busy amongst the landed cargo. At this point she paused for a moment to take out something from under the folded shawl. It was a scarlet sunshade; and when she had opened it and raised it over her head, very fine it looked, for the sharp black rays of the framework only made the translucency of the silk more apparent, and there was a soft rose-red glow under this splendid canopy. Perhaps her eyes were a little timid as she went forward again; but she could lower the sunshade an inch or two and screen herself from observation if she chose. And in this wise she approached the *Aros Castle*.

There was little doing on board the steamer, the train

not yet having come in : the Captain was seated near the bridge, smoking his pipe, while the Purser was standing by, with a bundle of papers in his hand. But Ogilvie, at the moment, was not looking at these papers ; and it is quite certain that as Barbara approached, his attention must have been drawn to such a conspicuous object as a scarlet sunshade—conspicuous among the squalor of a quay. Moreover, if he had been in the mind to intercept her, even in the way of ordinary friendliness, a couple of seconds would have brought him to the landward end of the gangway. And yet he made no sign ; while she on her part, apparently taking no heed of his discourtesy, passed on, the proud elegance of her gait losing nothing of its accent.

“ Who’s that flaunting her feathers at ye, Jack ? ” the Captain said, with a glance after her.

“ That was one of the Maclean girls,” he answered, carelessly.

But of a sudden Barbara turned ; she came deliberately back to the steamer ; and of course, as soon as he saw her put her foot on the gangway, he stepped forward to meet her.

“ Are you going over to the North Pier soon ? ” she asked, somewhat stiffly.

“ Not very long now,” he answered her ; “ the train is nearly due.”

“ I am tired—I have been for a long walk,” she said.

“ Then you could not do better than let us take you across,” said he ; and he went and fetched a camp-stool for her. The Captain, a taciturn man, put his pipe in his waistcoat pocket, and got up and walked away, his hands behind his back.

She hardly knew what to do or say. Sullen and wrathful as she was over his indifference, she yet feared to widen the breach between them.

“ I suppose you have more and more people coming every day,” she said.

“ Oh, yes, the season has well begun now,” he answered her. “ The fine weather brings out the tourists like horse-flies.”

“ You need not quarrel with what gets you your living,” she said, again.

"It's a pretty poor living," he rejoined—but he was looking away towards the station, into which the train had just slowly crept.

"And I suppose," she continued, with just the suspicion of a taunt, "that you are kept as busy during the evenings as during the day?"

"One has got to work," he said. And then he glanced at her costume, and the splendour of the rose-red parasol. "You are better off. You can take your holidays when you like."

"I would not be a slave at all hours," she retorted. "I would not be a slave for any one."

"You are lucky," he said. "Some of us have got to be slaves." And with that he left her, and went to the head of the gangway; for the first of the hotel omnibuses had just arrived, and the people were descending.

She did not have further talk with him for some time; she could only sit patiently and follow him with her eyes, especially noting his demeanour towards the young ladies and their mammas who came on board. He himself had half-jestingly complained of their treatment of him—that at the very most they would throw him a word of civility as they would throw a bone to a dog; but Barbara's observation did not tell her that such was the case; he seemed to be known to many; and the greetings that were exchanged, as this one or that came along and stepped on to the deck, were quite sufficiently pleasant and friendly. And why would he not smile in that fashion upon her? The beams of the sun-god could so easily have dissipated her anger!

She waited and waited, and still he did not return to her. The steamer's bell was rung a third time; there was a brief interval; a last passenger or two came running; and then the gangway was withdrawn, the captain signalled down to the engine-room, and the paddle-wheels began to revolve. There remained now but the breadth of Duntroone Bay—so short a space for speech! With feverish impatience she watched him go hither and thither; and apparently he had no great business on hand; for eventually he stood idly chatting and laughing with a man she knew very well by sight—the chief draper in Duntroone. Nay, his neglect of her seemed intentional—an open insult; she already saw

herself leave the boat in proud silence, with a bitter resolve that henceforth they should be absolute strangers to each other. And indeed it was not until the very last minute, as the steamer was nearing the North Pier, that he came quickly along to her and said :

"Well, now, Miss Barbara, I'm very glad we had the chance of bringing you across ; and you must make use of the steamer whenever you are over on the other side. And remember me to your aunt and Miss Jessie—Jessie the Flower of Duntroone, as Mr. McFadyen would say."

He spoke in his usual free and off-hand fashion ; and her keen mortification and resentment, that had been longing for expression in some indignant act or look, got all blunted and subdued and dispelled.

"I hope you will come in some evening and see them," she said, as she stepped on to the gangway—and for a moment her eyes did seek his with some timid appeal.

"Oh, yes, yes," he answered her, good-naturedly enough ; and then she passed along, and got ashore, and was lost in the crowd. She did not stay to look at the departing steamer. She hurriedly shut up the red sunshade, and carefully hid it under the shawl hanging over her arm ; and, thus shorn of her glory, she left the quay and made her way home.

That same evening Mrs. Maclean, Jess, and Barbara, the varied toil of the day over, were seated at their frugal meal ; and the widow was talking in an unusually concerned and anxious manner. It appeared that some time during the afternoon, on her way to the shipping office to pay freights, she had chanced to meet Allan Henderson ; and she had been greatly struck by the serious change in his looks ; he seemed ill, and careworn, and depressed, though he would not admit that anything was wrong.

"And I feel kind of responsible for the lad," she continued, "for we are all the kith and kin he has near him. But he's that stubborn ; he'll not take advice ; he thinks he can do anything with his constitution—that has served him well so far, I admit ; but how long is it going to stand out against careless treatment and overwork ? I'm sure I hope the warning has not come now—poor lad, my heart was sore to see him ; but would he say there was anything

wrong?—not a bit!—he only laughed and declared he had no time to imagine himself an invalid. It was not a happy kind of a laugh either—there's something on the lad's mind; that I'm convinced of——”

“Mother,” said Jess, “if he is looking so ill, don't you thing we could send Dr. McGillivray—Allan could not well refuse to see him——”

“But he would—he would,” the little widow rejoined. “I just begged and prayed him to insult a doctor—if only to save us from anxiety; but as I tell ye, he's that stubborn; and he thinks he's made of cast-iron. And a more perneecious idea cannot get hold of a young man.”

She paused for a moment or two; and then resumed, in a more cheerful tone—

“Well, for another reason I was pleased to meet the lad, and glad to find him just as simple and honest and straight-spoken as ever. He has not been near us for a while now; and I was rather wondering whether his college-learning and his classes might not be beginning to make him a little set up, so that he would not care about being seen coming into a tobacco shop and sitting down among friends there——”

“It's little you know Allan,” said Jess, proudly, “if you could suspect him of any such thing!”

“Ah, but there's curious ideas get into the minds of young folks,” said the widow, shaking her head. Then she added pointedly: And I would ask you this, Jess; supposing that Allan was ever to give himself airs like that, who would be accountable for it?—who but you yourself? Who but you—talking of the great things he's to look forward to, and setting him on, and making so much of him? Many's the time I've watched him with his great eyes glowering into the fire, while you were telling him of this one and the other that had gone away to London and become famous; and was it not you yourself, Jessie—and that not so long ago either—was it not you yourself that was saying there would come a day when we would be wondering that Allan Henderson ever used to come into our parlour, and sit down and chat with us, and smoke his pipe?”

But Jess was in nowise abashed.

"And if I did?" she replied promptly. "That is saying one thing. But it is quite a different thing to suppose that Allan would ever show himself ashamed of us, no, not if he were coming back from dining with the Queen at Windsor Castle. It is not in his nature to be like that; he would not understand it; he is too thorough through and through; meanness and pretence of that kind he simply could not comprehend. You might as well——"

"Ay, Jess," her mother interposed, drily, "You've aye got a fair word for Allan behind his back; it's a pity you're not more civil to him before his face."

To which there was no reply; for now supper was over; Mrs. Maclean took up the *Dunroon Times and Telegraph*, to read the news from the outer isles; the girl Christina was called in to clear the table; while Jess went away to her own room to fetch some piece of dress that she wished to mend. Barbara sat down and began to plait a collar for a kitten that had recently been presented to her.

It was a quiet evening and apparently uneventful; and yet something strange occurred, under that placid surface. Jess Maclean was away for a considerable time before she returned with the garment she had been seeking; and when she appeared at the door again, she said, in accents of surprise—

"Barbara, where did you get that red sunshade? I could not find my pelisse, and I thought it might have been put into your drawer——"

Barbara had started to her feet, her face betraying the most vivid alarm; and instantly she stepped across the room before Jess could add another word. Indeed, so quick were her movements, and so deeply was Mrs. Maclean engrossed with her newspaper, that the widow, who had not chanced to overhear Jessie's question, did not even now notice that both girls had disappeared. Barbara dragged her cousin into the adjacent room.

"I am not wishing your mother to know," she said, in the greatest confusion; and she went hurriedly to the drawer, and opened it, and proceeded to securely cover over the sunshade, which was down at the bottom.

Jess was astonished beyond measure.

"I am sure, Barbara," she said, "I did not intend to

pry into any secret. But I thought my pelisse might be there. And how do you think my mother is not to know?—she will see you carrying the sunshade when you go out.”

“No, no,” said Barbara, who seemed terrified. “I can hide it—perhaps I will not use it often——”

“Why,” said Jess, goodnaturedly, “you would not have such a fine thing as that, and keep it locked up in a drawer? What did it cost you, Barbara?”

The eyes of the girl looked frightened and bewildered.

“The cost?” she repeated, “the cost—it was fifteen shillings.”

“Well, that is a good deal of money——”

“No, it was twelve shillings,” Barbara broke in, in a breathless kind of way. “I have not paid for it yet—it is to-morrow that I am to pay for it—the twelve shillings.”

“And even that,” said Jess, laughing—though she was still unable to account for her cousin’s confusion and distress—“even that is a good deal to pay for something you mean to keep locked up in a drawer. It is not a good investment, Barbara. I think you would be better with the money. A sunshade is not quite the right thing to lay up for a rainy day, is it?”

“But you will not tell your mother, Jessie?” Barbara demanded quickly.

“Oh, no,” Jess responded. “If it is a secret, it is a secret. But I do not understand why you should have bought such an expensive thing, only to cover it up in a drawer. Barbara, you are a spendthrift—that is what you are.”

“Do not speak of it to any one, Jessie,” the girl said, in a low voice. “There is no use in speaking of it.”

And with that she lowered the gas, and the two girls returned to the parlour and to their respective occupations: Barbara silent and constrained—Jess, though without any deep pondering on the subject, remaining somewhat puzzled.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A HALF-HOLIDAY AND THEREAFTER.

WHEN at length the new links were completed and thrown open to the members of the Golfing Club, the councillor and the station-master managed to secure a vacant couple of hours for their long-talked-of match ; while Mrs. Gilmour and Jess Maclean—Barbara having declined—had been persuaded to accompany them, to spur them on to honourable emulation. And auspicious and exhilarating was the morning on which they left the town and climbed away up to the breezy heights on which the greens and the teeing-grounds had been carefully planned out ; the surrounding undulations of larch-wood were stirring, and yet no more than stirring, in the soft summer air ; the peaks of Ben Cruachan, clear to the top, were of a faint and transparent azure in the luminous silver skies. Peter of course rose to such an occasion ; he was emphatically insisting on the value of physical exercise ; he made merry jests at the expense of the tall, grim, red-haired station-master ; he playfully wanted to know what reward the fair spectators had in store for the victor in the contest. Nay, as now falls to be related, his high spirits eventually got the better of him, and landed him in a predicament the like of which it is to be hoped no golfer had ever before encountered.

For Mr. McFadyen had been over the links, whereas the station-master had not ; and accordingly, when they had secured the services of a caddie, the councillor undertook to lead the way and show his friendly enemy the whereabouts of the holes. His first drive was an excellent one.

“That’s something like, now—if you keep that up you’ll do,” Gilmour cried, encouragingly—though the remark seemed rather to reflect on previous performances.

“I’ll bet ye half-a-crown on this hole !” interposed the councillor, in a taunting fashion.

"Away wi' your half-crowns!" the other said with contempt. "It would be wiser-like if ye'd walk on, and keep an eye on my ball."

This Peter proceeded to do, though with what secret thoughts—whether of mere devilment or of deliberate revenge—will probably never be known. He went away forward and got on to the top of a knoll; with word and gesture he indicated the whereabouts of the green; and then he waited for the station-master's drive. This also was an excellent one; the ball came sailing and sailing along, triumphantly clearing a wide extent of rushy ground that might have proved a formidable hazard; until finally, out of sight of everybody but the councillor, it landed in a slight hollow, fair on the way to the hole. What followed was remarkable. Mr. McFadyen, instead of remaining by his own ball and waiting until the others came up, now walked quickly across to where the station-master's ball had fallen; he picked up that small white sphere, and slipped it into his pocket; and when his companions arrived, he was diligently striking with his club at patches of ragwort, and hunting all about.

"Dod," said he, seriously, "I could ha' sworn your ball fell just here, Jamie—it must be in the weeds somewhere—it's just extraordinary how a ball gets covered sometimes—and the next day you'll find it easily enough—lying in the open——"

They were all looking about now—the station-master inclined to be angry at this unexpected check.

"Ye might have kept an eye on it, man!" he said to the councillor.

"But I did!" retorted Peter. "I tell ye I saw it fall just about here——"

"Ay, and did ye observe the earth open and swallow it up?" demanded the long, thin, fiery-headed man, peevishly. "A fine one you are to keep an eye on a ball!"

"You'd better find it anyway," remarked Peter, with great composure, "or the hole's mine."

They could not find the ball; they pried and prodded; they kicked at the little clumps of ragwort; they pressed their foot on the long grass. And meanwhile the councillor was jeering.

"Jamie, my man, if ye lose five minutes for every drive ye make, it's little ye'll see of the twelve-twenty train the day."

"I give ye the hole," the station-master said snappishly. "Let's get on to the next teeing-ground."

And again the small group moved on—Jess openly sympathizing with the station-master over his misfortune. For she could not but observe that there was about Mr. McFadyen a look of mysteriously reticent diversion; he did not say anything, but his eyes were covertly amused and laughing; while his face remained portentously grave. She did not think it becoming that he should inwardly rejoice over the misadventure of a lost ball.

They reached the next teeing-ground, and here Peter gave his antagonist general directions as to the lie of the second hole, betwixt which and them ran at right angles a considerably high stone wall. Clearly the object of the opening drive was to get well over this dangerous obstruction; and the councillor, having the 'honour,' got away in capital style.

"Ye're doing fine, Mr. McFadyen," said the station-master's wife, approvingly, and unmindful of her husband's morose looks.

"Sometimes I'm better than at other times," the councillor responded, modestly. And then he gave a sharp little snort of a giggle, without apparent cause.

It was now Gilmour's turn; and it was obvious that he meant to secure this next hole, or perish in the attempt. He was most cautious about the tee; he patted down the ground behind it; he took a long look forward; he raised his club slowly, and then down it came with a slashing "swipe"; away went the ball in a beautiful curve, the size of it dwindling and dwindling, until it disappeared.

"You're no over, Jamie," remarked the councillor.

"Not over?" the station-master rejoined angrily. "I'm over, and halfway up the other side."

"You're no over," repeated Peter, with confidence; and again they moved forward.

Now for the convenience of players and their friends the constructors of the links had placed a flight of wooden steps on each side of the wall; and this little party of four were

just about to ascend and descend when the unspeakable councillor, taking from his pocket the ball (the station-master's) which he had previously picked up, managed to drop it unseen, and that close in to the foot of the stone dyke.

"Here, Jamie, man," he called to his foe. "Here ye are. Did not I tell ye ye did not get over?"

The station-master turned and stared. There certainly was a ball lying there.

"God bless me!" he exclaimed. "I would have bet a hundred pounds I was over, and well over. Did ye not think I was well over, Miss Jessie?"

"Indeed, then, I did," answered Jess.

"My fine chappie, that's all the length ye've got," the councillor maintained. "Take up the ball and look."

There could be no doubt about it; for whereas Mr. McFadyen, being in such matters of an economical turn of mind, was in the habit of using re-made balls, Gilmour was extravagant enough to treat himself to the genuine Silvertown.

"I never saw the like—I could have bet a thousand pounds I was well over!" the mortified station-master exclaimed again. "Well, I must try to get the brute over somehow."

Alas! his efforts in this direction were a series of ghastly failures; his score mounted up dreadfully; while Peter McFadyen, throwing all decency to the winds, abandoned himself to shrieks and roars of hysterical laughter. It was a disgraceful exhibition; for the oftener Gilmour's ball struck the dyke, rebounding on the hither side, the more incontinent became Peter's mirth; his doubled-up frame shook with his wild guffaws; he dashed the fist of one hand into the palm of the other; tears were running down his cheeks.

"Oh, Jamie, Jamie," he cried, "if ye hammer long enough, ye'll have the wall down; but over it ye'll not get this day."

Nevertheless the incensed and savage station-master did at length succeed in surmounting this hateful obstacle; and then it was that the councillor, getting over the dyke, forged rapidly on ahead. Apparently he was looking for his ball;

and one ball he certainly did find—a ball that he swiftly and furtively slipped into his pocket ; then he continued his search, until he joyfully called out—

“ Yes, here I am. Where are you, Jamie ? ”

“ I may as well give up this hole too,” said the station-master, gloomily.

“ No, no, never say die ! ” rejoined the councillor, in whose twinkling eyes there was still a dark and inscrutable merriment. “ Maybe you’ll beat me on the green after all.”

“ Beat you on the green when I’m nine already ! ” the station-master growled. Indeed, he had no chance at all ; for as it turned out, the councillor got on to the green with his next stroke ; and by a perfectly marvellous ‘ put ’ holed out in three. The station-master’s wife and Jess were unstinted in their applause.

And now it was that the victorious McFadyen found himself in the predicament which was the natural and fitting requital of his infamy. It is quite possible that he had intended confessing the double trick he had so shamefully played on the station-master, and proposing that they should go back and start fair from the beginning ; but now—now that he had won the second hole in three—now that he had received the congratulations of the spectators—now that there was a chance of his making a splendid score—the temptation to silence was terrible. The only point was—Had the sharp-eyed caddie noticed his picking up Gilmour’s ball, and his subsequently depositing it at the foot of the dyke ? Would the imp go away among his fellows and tell the tale ? Would they talk amongst themselves about the ‘ cheating man ’—and perhaps, some day, reveal the story to one of the members ? These were wild and whirling thoughts ; and yet there was no time for deliberation ; Peter had again to lead off ; and his companions were already on the teeing-ground. The councillor went forward and took up his position ; the caddie made a tee for him and carefully placed the ball ; the spectators were all attention. And even now, at this last moment, if he had made a bad stroke, he would probably have owned up, and insisted on beginning all over again ; but unfortunately he led off with a magnificent drive ; to sacrifice such

a fascinating chance of the third hole would be too heart-rending ; without a word—just as if everything had been fair, square, and aboveboard—he waited for the station-master to follow. And this third hole also Peter won easily.

“ Well, indeed, Mr. McFadyen,” said Jessie, “ you are carrying everything before you to-day. I think you must have been concealing your skill all this time.”

He glanced at her quickly and nervously ; but there was no guile in Jess’s honest grey eyes.

“ Oh, I know something of the game,” said he ; “ I admit I know a little of the game—but I’m not always at my best.”

The strange thing was that although success continued to reward his efforts, and that in quite a remarkable manner, his spirits did not rise in proportion ; there was no more wild laughter over Gilmour’s disappointment ; there was no bravado on the putting-green. Occasionally, when his triumphant career was winning general approval, he would turn suddenly and scan the face of the caddie ; but that phlegmatic youth returned no answering glance ; if he had seen that which he ought not to have seen, he made no sign. And so the game went on ; and fortune all the way through favoured the unjust ; Gilmour was hopelessly beaten ; Peter was the hero of the hour—though he bore his honours with unusual modesty.

When at length they reached the little wooden shanty belonging to the Club, Gilmour, his wife, and Jess remained outside, while the caddie went inside to hang up the bags. Mr. McFayden, observing the opportunity, slipped in after him.

“ Well, my lad,” said he, in an offhand and merry way—and he pretended to be tightening up a leather strap, “ that was a fine trick, wasn’t it ? ”

The eyes of the youth answered with a blank stare, which so far was a comforting thing. But Peter was determined to make sure.

“ A good joke, wasn’t it—at the two first holes ? ” said he, encouragingly.

And again there was a blank stare : no hideous and self-conscious grin. A heavy weight seemed to be removing itself from Peter’s sinful soul.

"Why, don't ye remember," he said, with quite blithe hypocrisy, "don't ye remember the hash Mr. Gilmour made of it at the dyke? A great joke that was: I'll be bound ye don't often see such an angry man. Well, here's an extra shilling for ye: ye need not say anything about it, for it's against the rules; but a discreet tongue is just the best thing a decent, quiet, sensible laddie like you can have."

And therewith he went out and rejoined his companions: and as they walked away across the heights and down towards the town, the chubby and cheerful councillor was more like his natural self. At times, indeed, a thoughtful shade would come over his face—perhaps the small, still voice was reminding him how he had basely deceived these trusting friends; but then again the glory of being the conqueror—the delight of having so thoroughly routed the station-master—the sweet praises from smiling lips—all combined to stifle his conscience, until he appeared actually to rejoice in his iniquity. When finally they parted to go their several ways, Peter was laughing without and within: never had he seen Jamie Gilmour so completely crest-fallen.

It was seldom at this busy time of the year that Jess Maclean allowed herself the luxury of even a half-holiday; and to make up for the morning on the links she was devoting the evening to her account-books, when a tapping at the parlour door announced a visitor. She looked up. It was the schoolmaster. But the sunlight that leapt into her face—and especially into her eyes—at the mere sight of him, soon vanished when she heard his news.

"It's a great chance for me," he said, in an absent kind of way, when he had explained the offer of a travelling-tutorship that had been made him: "and I owe it to the kindness of Professor Menzies, who was always very friendly towards me when I was in Glasgow. Two years of European travel—all expenses paid—and a handsome salary besides: I never could have dreamed of such a chance. And the young gentleman, I am told, is a most modest, good-natured, well-mannered lad——"

"Oh, as for that," said Jess, who, even in her dismay at the prospect of this long separation, could not forego her

gibes, "as for that, if there is to be any bear-leading I know which of you will be the bear."

"No, I never dreamed of such a chance," he went on, "when I was cutting out pictures of the capitals of Europe, and pasting them in a scrap-book, and wondering whether my small savings and a few weeks' holiday would ever carry me to those places. Of course, there will be the giving up of my classes; and that will be a sacrifice; for I am interested in many of the lads—their eagerness, their determination, is something fine—" He stopped short. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Maclean," he said, humbly, "for bothering you about my poor affairs—they're of little enough concern to any one——"

"Allan Henderson, I wonder to hear ye!" exclaimed the little widow; and then she proceeded, with considerable warmth: "Concern? I should think they were of very near concern to us. And what is this you are talking of now but two years' banishment—nothing but two years' banishment—away among a lot of heathens, with their concerts and dancing and theatres on the blessed Sabbath-day. I'm thinking it would be sensibler-like of you to stay among your own folk, and wi' your own kith and kin; and be thankful for the opportunities. But well I know," she continued, with an indignant look towards her daughter, "well I know who is driving you to this. It's none but Jess there, that has her head filled wi' flighty notions, and will not let things be, but would have ye go away among strangers——"

"Mother!" said Jess, in protest—and tears sprang to her eyes. "If ever I said—that Allan should go away from among us—at least—it was with no thought or wish that harm should come to him——"

She was not a very emotional young woman; but at this point she did break down somewhat; and to hide her shame and distress she rose quickly and went away from the room. When Allan, after a few minutes more of talk with the widow, bade her good-night and passed into the front shop, he found Jess sitting there, shy, embarrassed and silent.

"Indeed, Jessie," said he, "I'm very sorry you should have been hurt. Your mother did not mean anything.

And if I am going away, you know very well what it is that is driving me away."

She looked up—the grey eyes timid.

"I can see there is no hope for me now," he went on, in a sombre kind of fashion. "If I were a rich man, it might be different. Have you noticed that about Barbara, Jessie?—how easily her fancy is captivated by a pretty thing—some piece of dress—some article of display. If it is a weakness, it is only a harmless and childish weakness: it is not very blameable. A beautiful creature like that must know that people like to look at her; and it is but natural for her to think of adornment; it is but natural she should wish to be admired. And if I were a rich man, perhaps I could please her that way; gratitude is very near to affection; perhaps I could win her regard that way. But as it is——"

He did not finish the sentence. She was looking at him strangely and wistfully.

"And are you really leaving us, Allan—and for two long years?"

"I cannot remain in this town," he answered her. "It has become an absolute hell to me—an inconceivable and unceasing torture. I must get away—and here is such a chance as I never could have hoped for. But in two years' time, Jessie," he continued, heartening himself up somewhat, "one will have forgotten a great deal; and when I come back to Duntroone, the very first thing I will do will be to come in here, and ask for you, and report myself sane. And this I know well, that I shall find you just as friendly and kindly as ever, just as unselfish and generous as ever. For it is not necessary that in two years' time one should forget everything; and that is what I am not likely to forget—your gentleness, and your goodness, and your toleration of a thrawn and thankless wretch."

Her face brightened and flushed with pleasure: it was rarely that he spoke out in such a fashion. And she had it in mind to ask him if she might write to him and give him the Duntroone news when he was away in the great and busy capitals; but at this moment a customer entered the shop; whereupon Allan shook hands with her, and bade her good-night and took his leave. On his homeward way his

heart was not quite so heavy : a chat with Jess—even when she was in a spiteful mood—was a reassuring, inspiring sort of thing ; and he could not but be grateful to her for the solicitude and the well-wishing so clearly visible in her kindly grey eyes.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN ASSIGNATION.

EVENTS were now clearly marching on to a climax, if not to a catastrophe ; though these various personages, occupied with the pressing and immediate demands of every-day life, may not themselves have perceived it. Barbara had most time for reflection, if that could be called reflection that was more like the frantic struggling of some wild animal with an environing net. And it was in these dark hours of reverie, with their clinging hopes, their piteous longings, and sometimes their bitter and fierce resentment, that she at length arrived at a definite resolve : she would remain in this anguish of doubt no longer ; she would force the hand of fate, let come what might. As it chanced, the opportunity was soon enough to present itself.

For there now appeared in Duntroone a certain Mr. and Mrs. McKechnie, who were in some distant way related to the Macleans. Mr. McKechnie was a manufacturer of aerated-waters in Greenock, a well-to-do man, and a person of consequence in the eyes of the widow ; and when the McKechnies came along to the tobacconist's shop to pay a friendly visit, and to propose that both mother and daughter should dine with them that evening at the Commercial Hotel, the invitation was accepted with alacrity. Then something was said about Barbara—for Mrs. Maclean was ever mindful of her kith and kin ; and the soda-water man at once and generously said that she must also be of the party. So when Jess went across to the house for her mid-day meal, she made sure that Barbara would be highly pleased.

To her astonishment, however, she found that Barbara,

as soon as she had ascertained that Mrs. Maclean and Jess were to spend the evening at the Commercial Hotel—Barbara obdurately refused to go, and would not be persuaded.

“Why,” said Jess, laughing, “I thought it was just what would delight you, Barbara! The chance of seeing the gay world—and of wearing your best things——”

“I have a lot to do,” said Barbara, hurriedly and confusedly. “And my head is not very well to-day—I would rather stay at home. What hour will it be before you are back, Jessie?”

“Oh, well,” said Jess, “Mr. McKechnie thinks a good deal of himself, and he is very fond of talking; and if he has a private room, and some toddy, he may keep us till half-past ten or eleven.”

“You will not be back before half-past ten anyway?” Barbara asked again.

“It is not likely,” said Jess—attaching no weight to the question.

All that afternoon, whatever her duties happened to be, Barbara would from time to time take out from her pocket a scrap of paper and anxiously scrutinise the words scribbled on it. She seemed perturbed and restless; occasionally she would desist from her tasks altogether, and lapse into profound meditation; then she would resume her work, with a heavy sigh. Or again she would take out the fragment of paper and tear it up, substituting for it another scrap with a different message written on it. The finally amended words—carefully transcribed, and folded, and placed in an envelope—were these: ‘Will you meet me to-night at nine o’clock, at the small gate under the Castle hill? I have something of importance to say to you.—Barbara.’

In the evening, Mrs. Maclean and Jess—leaving the girl Christina in charge of the shop—came over to get ready for their dinner-party; and directly after they had left the house, Barbara also stole out. It was a beautiful evening—a golden evening in June; there were plenty of people strolling to and fro, and the quays were still busy; but she paid little heed to what was passing around her until she reached the South Pier. The *Aros Castle* was now coming

in ; she was already half-way across the bay ; the throb of her paddles was repeated in the echoing hollows of the Gallows Hill. Barbara got hold of a small boy who was playing with his companions about one of the wooden sheds.

“Do you know Ogilvie the purser ?” she asked of him.

“Ay, fine,” was the prompt reply.

“Will you take this letter to him if I give you a penny ?”

“Ay.”

“But you’ll make sure that you give it to himself ?”

“Ay,” said the urchin—with eager eyes watching for the unusual coin.

He got the letter and the penny ; the *Aros Cusle* came slowly in to the quay ; and Barbara, from the corner of the shed, could see that Ogilvie was on the upper deck. But still she waited to satisfy herself of the delivering of the message—waited until the steamer had been made fast—until the passengers had come ashore—until she saw the small boy go along the gangway and give the white envelope into the Purser’s hands. That was enough. She withdrew from her shelter so that she herself could not be perceived ; she hurried round by the harbour ; and when she reached home again, she sank into a chair, and remained there a long time, thinking back as to what she had done. But presently she had to think forward—as the clock on the mantelpiece reminded her troubled and anxious eyes ; and she went away to her room to array herself in her best. As she stood before the mirror her fingers were shaking so that she could hardly hold a pin.

At half-past eight or thereabouts she again left the house, and, taking advantage of such back approaches as were available, she made for the point at which the grounds of Duntroone Castle came nearly up to the last of the gardened villas. Further than this point there is no right of way ; but an occasional stranger passing along by the rocks is not much objected to ; and it was by the rocks that she now proceeded—before her the sheltered little bay, beyond that the old-fashioned garden beneath the Castle hill, and, towering over all, the ruined keep, dark with its ivy against the splendour of the west. For although the

sun had gone down behind the mountains, at this time of the year in those latitudes the marvellous twilights may be said to last almost the night through ; and even now, as the solitary figure went along by the shelving beach, there was a glory around her—all the world was aflame with colour. And then as she drew near to the wind-stunted trees at the foot of the Castle Rock, the jet-black stems and sombre foliage served but to increase the brilliancy of the western heavens ; these were as a wide sea of clear and luminous steel-grey, with long cloud-islands of pale rose-purple, whose golden strands looked down upon the unseen horizon. Overhead the skies were of a faint and exquisite azure, flecked here and there with vaporous fragments of saffron huc, that appeared as if they could still behold the sunset fires. And in the east the wooded hills were all aglow.

She opened the small wicket-gate, and stepped in under the dense canopy of leaves ; from this shadowed retreat, herself unobserved, she could look back over the way she had come—by the out-jutting rocks, and round the semi-circular sweep of the shore. It was a peaceful and secluded scene ; there was not a sign of life anywhere ; an occasional sound, that spoke of distant human habitation, was softened and remote. But there was another sound, all around her, and especially out towards the west : the mysterious murmur of the moving tides, as if the islands were talking to each other of the coming darkness—the strange clear darkness that would later on melt into the white dawn. As yet there was no token of change. The saffron flakes of cloud were still lambent in the azure vault ; the hanging woods, of beech, and ash, and fir, glowed warm above the tranquil waters of the bay.

Surely it was a fitting time and place for a meeting of lovers ; and yet Barbara, gazing across those placid waters, began to tremble at the thought of seeing the single figure she was looking for appear at the verge of the rocks. What she had done she had done in a sort of desperation ; but now, as minute after minute seemed to bring him nearer, she grew more and more vaguely apprehensive ; until at times a wild impulse would seize her to turn and flee away through the woods, and hide herself, and make good her

return to Duntroone by some circuitous route. And then again she had already dared so much. And if she were to escape now, and get home in safety, would not to-morrow be but as yesterday—with its agonising consciousness that she could not speak with Ogilvie except on the deck of a crowded steamer, with strangers all around, and himself liable to be called away hither and thither; whereas here, in this gracious solitude and silence, there would be the charm and magnetism of personal appeal, eyes answering eyes, and speech, no longer cold and conventional, attuned to every varying mood. The anticipation of this meeting made her heart beat violently; and when her straining eyes fancied they could detect a dark figure out at the rocky promontory, her whole frame shivered. And yet she held her ground. Her lips were dry; her breathing came and went with difficulty, as if there were some weight on her chest.

Of a sudden she uttered a sharp, half-stifled scream of terror, and wheeled round, for some one had noiselessly and stealthily approached her from behind. It was Niall Gorach. And the moment she recognised who this was, her fear gave way to wrath.

“Is it a weasel you are, that you come stealing through the woods like that?” she said to him, in Gaelic; and the beautiful eyes were now blazing with anger. “What is it you want?”

He regarded her doubtfully.

“I have two rabbits,” he said, also in Gaelic, “I have them back there in the bushes.”

“Away with you, you imp of mischief!” she said. “Is it I that would be wishing for two rabbits!”

“You could hide them in your dress,” said he, in an undertone, and he was intently watching the expression of her face. “They are for the other girl—the one that was kind to me. You could take them into the town, and give them to her in the shop—no one would see you.”

“Go away—go away at once!” she said, with frowning brows. “It is the gamekeeper who will be after you and your rabbits—and the sooner you are in jail the better.”

Niall needed no further word than that. He instantly retreated, by the way he came, disappearing through the

trees and bushes ; and once more she was alone. But this interruption had at least startled her out of the tremulous, apprehensive, half-hysterical mood that had taken possession of her ; she returned to her post of observation with a bolder spirit ; she would no longer be afraid if she saw a dark-clad figure appear at the point of the rocks. Nay, it was something quite different that she began to fear ; a haunting possibility that had more than once crept into her mind, only to be dismissed with quick alarm and trepidation. And now it would recur with bewildering distinctness. Had he resolved to treat her appeal with scorn ? Would he refuse to come near her ? Would he revenge himself on her because she had been the innocent cause of some quarrelling and fighting between him and the schoolmaster ?

No, she tried to persuade herself, it was inconceivable ; he could not be so merciless and unjust. He would in any case come and hear what she had to say ; it was the smallest grace he could accord her ; any stranger would do as much. And he had been far from acting the stranger towards her. He had sought her society, and made much of her, and paid her compliments : it was no stranger who had entirely devoted himself to her on the evening of the dance given by the Gaelic Choir. And when she could talk face-to-face with him, here in the happy and favouring twilight, it would be otherwise with them both than on the open passenger-deck of the *Aros Castle*.

Nevertheless, as the time went slowly and remorselessly by, a pitiful yearning arose in her heart. It could not be that he meant to forsake her—that he meant to put this cruel slight upon her ! He had misread the hour. He had been detained by friends. Something had happened to hinder him, perhaps even after he had set out. Another minute—another couple of minutes—and he would become visible yonder at the verge of the rocks, hastening to bring apologies and pacifications. For he was not one to strike a woman—and to strike deep.

The inexorable moments stole on, one after another—though there was little change in this magic world of light and colour ; and now that piteous craving and desire had grown to be an aching that seemed bitterer than death itself. If only he would appear in sight—if only he would

come along by the shore there, no matter in what mood of impatience, or sarcasm, or even contempt—she would abase herself before him ; she would plead for pardon ; she would beg for kindness. She knew that she had been stiff-necked, and flighty, and wayward ; she had held her head too high ; she had taunted him—when he was not to blame. But now, if only he would come to her, she would receive his reproaches with meekness ; she would do anything he wished ; she would be his abject slave. Let him impose his demands, and she would accede—only, he could not mean to desert her for ever ! Had she not humbled herself already, in seeking for this assignation ? And life was a pleasant and gay thing for him ; he could not wish to stab her to the heart.

She withdrew her eyes from the distant promontory, and in a dazed fashion looked around her, asking what time of the night had arrived. There was no darkness, nor anything approaching to darkness, as yet. The heavens overhead had grown to be of the rarest rose-grey ; all the fragments of cloud had disappeared ; and through the scarcely-moving leaves of the trees—through the jet-black stems—there gleamed the vivid and burning gold of a crescent moon. And still the creeping tides along the coast murmured and whispered to themselves in the silence ; but elsewhere all was still ; not the faintest sound came from the unseen Duntroone. She judged that she had waited there an hour ; it must be now ten o'clock.

Then suddenly a strange pallor overspread her features, and her mouth was set hard. She pushed open the small gate in front of her, and passed out into the clear twilight. With head erect—and not looking in the direction of the rocks at all—she continued on her way, along by the wall of the old garden, and round by the curve of the shore. It is true that there were tears in her lashes ; but they were tears of rage and mortification ; they were not bidden there, nor did they betoken any weakness or self-pity. Her naturally proud gait had no lassitude in it—though she had been standing under those trees for nigh an hour.

Nay, when Mrs. Maclean and Jess came home, they found Barbara in a mood of most unusual sprightliness and content. She would make tea for them—she would insist on

making tea for them, though neither of them wanted it ; and as she went about the parlour, she was singing to herself. She had but little of a voice, to be sure ; nevertheless, it was well that the girl should be of a light heart ; and Mrs. Maclean listened pleased and benignant :

*He gave me ribbons for my neck,
And side-combs for my hair,
He gave me ear-rings for my ears,
With pearl drops rich and rare ;
No wonder that I love my lad
That's sailing the salt sea ——*

“Ay,” said the shrewd little widow, in her kindest manner, “and is that the Purser you are singing about, Barbara ?”

Barbara turned round, and stared, as bold as brass.

“The Purser ?” she said. “Do you mean Ogilvie—him that Mr. McFadyen was calling an empty-headed dandy ? It would be a strange thing indeed if I was thinking of any one like that !”

And she went on with her ministrations, affecting to sing blithely and carelessly. The widow, not understanding what all this meant, did not say a word.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SUNLIGHT ABROAD.

IT was between eleven and twelve on the forenoon of the following day that the scholars in Allan Henderson's class were aroused from the weariful monotony of their toil by an amazing apparition—for the advent of a stranger at the door of the hall could hardly be accounted less. Head after head was surreptitiously turned until the whole school was covertly staring at this new-comer, who stood there irresolute : the Master alone remained unconscious—he was working out on a slate before him some arithmetical problem, while two or three lads clustered around. A kind of hush of curiosity had fallen upon the dull, grey benches ;

the apparition of a visitor was an almost unprecedented thing ; moreover this visitor was a young woman. So unusual, indeed, was such an event that no one knew what to do : they waited for the Master himself to find out that a caller was there.

The slate was handed back to its owner ; at the same moment, by some freak of chance, Allan Henderson became aware that the distant doorway framed a human figure ; the next instant his startled vision had told him who this was. At once and hurriedly he quitted the narrow platform, passed down the middle of the room, and went out upon the stone staircase, whither Barbara had retreated as soon as she saw that he was coming. She was rather breathless, but she was trying to look pleased : the bewilderment was all on his side.

"When will you be leaving the school ?" she said.

"At one o'clock," he answered her—for this was a Saturday.

"Could you not come away rather earlier—about a quarter to one ?" she said ; "I am wishing to speak to you, if it is not too much trouble. My aunt she was telling me you are thinking of going away from this country for two years or the like of that ; and she was saying it was a great pity, to be going away from your own people and your friends ; and maybe you have not considered it. If you would come for a little walk, when the school is over, then there would be the chance of talking about it—and perhaps you will not go away from your friends——"

For a moment he was speechless : he could hardly believe his senses. Here, in the dusk of the stairway, was a sort of radiant creature ; and the marvel was that her voice, instead of being angry and taunting, was soft and ingratiating ; while her eyes, no longer darting scornful flames, were quite amiable, with a modest and conciliatory appeal in them. She was a trifle excited, it is true ; her sentences were somewhat disconnected ; but there was nothing save goodwill in her aspect. Nay, she seemed anxious he should clearly understand that he had awakened her interest and sympathy ; her looks, timid as they might be, were yet smilingly benignant ; he could not but perceive that her heart was warm and well-intentioned towards him. The schoolmaster

forgot his wondering school ; he forgot all the rest of the universe—blinded as he was by those beautiful, appealing, kindly eyes.

“ Indeed, I would not have sought to bother you with my poor affairs,” he managed to say, with great embarrassment—when she interrupted him—

“ But you can come a little before one ? ” she asked, quickly.

“ Yes, I think I can do that—— ”

“ And I will be waiting for you in front of the railway-station—we could have a little walk round by the shore—and by the Gallows Hill—or anywhere you pleased—— ”

It was an inconceivable kind of thing ; and yet surely he had heard aright ? And surely nothing could exceed the friendliness of her manner—if those liquid, clear-shining eyes spoke true ?

“ I hope you are not vexed with me for interrupting you,” she said, and the slight hesitation in her speech, along with its accent, was like music in his ears ; “ but I am sure it would be a pity if you went away from your own country, without a little consideration. And I will be there, waiting, if it is not too much trouble for you.”

“ The trouble ? ” said he—and even now he had not recovered from his stupefaction. “ I do not understand why you should concern yourself about me, or about anything that is likely to happen to me. I cannot understand your kindness. But I will meet you there—— ”

“ And at a quarter to one ? ” she asked again.

“ Yes, as soon as that, I hope,” he answered her. And then, without bidding him good-bye, but with a parting glance and a smile, she turned and left. What further instruction his pupils received that day may have been of any sort : it was little he knew. There was much that was ‘ taken for granted ’ so as to hurry on ; and by a quarter to one he had dismissed his class, and was himself free and in the outer air.

Yet that had been no incorporeal vision—no trick of the brain—no waking day-dream in the midst of the weary hours ; for now as he drew rapidly near the railway-station, he could see the actual and living Barbara undoubtedly standing there, just within the door of the ticket-

office, where she could occupy herself in watching the passers-by. Moreover, it was also clear that she had made use of the interval to deck herself out very bravely ; and did not that mean something too ? A wild confusion of joy arose in his heart ; he thought of the student's phrase in ' Faust '—' eine Magd im Putz ' ; surely it was something more than a mere friendly solicitude about his immediate plans that had led her to array herself so smartly in order to keep this appointment and go for a walk with him ? Nay, when she became conscious of his approach, the soft and rare shell-pink of her cheek deepened ; it was with a pretty bashfulness that she offered him her hand ; and quite naturally and lover-like she set herself by his side to accompany him. They passed out from the railway-station and took their way round by the harbour ; but in truth he did not heed which direction they followed : it was enough that some miracle had been wrought—and the world was filled with sunlight.

The strange thing was that although she had made this tryst with him ostensibly to discuss his future schemes, now that the opportunity had arrived she had not a word to say about them. She was talking to him, it is true, and with unusual eagerness and vivacity ; she was addressing him with glances as well as with speech ; she was smiling and laughing, and apparently she was greatly delighted to have him for her companion ; but all through this light-heartedness and affectation of interest, there was a forced note. Especially as they drew near to the South Quay—from which the *Aros Castle* was just about to depart—especially then did this half-hysterical merriment become more pronounced—until she hardly seemed to know what she was saying.

" Oh, yes, indeed," she continued—and never once were her eyes turned in the direction of the steamer—" yes, indeed—about Mr. McFadyen—the poor man must have suffered a great deal—before he was driven to confess. It was to Jessie that he came—and he told her he never meant to cheat—it was only a joke, picking up Mr. Gilmour's ball—but he was led into it—he was led into it ; and they did not notice the trick—and so, when it was too late, he let them think he had won the game fairly."

“And how long did his conscience slumber?” the schoolmaster asked.

“Never at all—never at all,” said Barbara, laughing and giggling in that curiously excited manner. At this moment they were passing along the quay, close to the shore end of the gangway; and if Barbara scrupulously kept her gaze fixed on the ground or turned towards the face of her companion, Allan Henderson at least was well aware that the Purser, on the upper deck of the vessel, was staring at them as they went by. “The poor man—I am sorry for him,” Barbara went on—and her feverish gaiety sounded far from natural. “It was to Jessie that he came first—to confess—maybe he was not able to sleep at nights for thinking of what he had done—and he was asking Jess whether he ought to tell Mr. Gilmour—or maybe it was enough if he confessed to her——”

“And did she grant him absolution, Barbara? Or did she impose a penance?” asked the schoolmaster, lightly. By this time, behind them, the *Aros Castle* had moved away from the quay, and was now steaming across to the North Pier. Allan could not understand why Barbara had so resolutely ignored the existence of the Purser: perhaps she was really preoccupied with this tale of hers about the dejection of the conscience-stricken councillor. Anyhow, it was as well that the steamer had gone; there would be no fear of interruption now.

But presently, when they had got past the quay and were approaching the Gallows Hill, her mood changed; her demonstrative hilarity vanished; she had nothing further to tell about the councillor and his remorse; she seemed rather inclined to be proud, and morose, and petulant.

“I do not understand,” she said, “why you should wish to go away from your own country.”

“It is something to see the world,” he answered her, but with no great enthusiasm: how easy it was for her to say the word that would have held him back!

“The day and the night there,” she continued, “are the same as the day and the night here; you cannot live more there than you can here. And if it is for money, well, I am hearing from more than one that your classes in the evening

are doing fine ; and why should you make such a sacrifice—that is what I hear them asking——”

“Money is not everything,” he made answer. And then he hesitated. He dared not imperil these wonderful new relations that had been so suddenly established. It was so surprising and unaccountable a thing to find himself walking with Barbara in this sweetheart fashion—herself neatly pranked out for the occasion—her eyes and voice betraying at least some measure of amiability towards him—that he dreaded to destroy his chances by any precipitancy. And yet he said : “There is one that could bid me stay, if she wished.”

“And who is that one ?” she asked.

They were now ascending the Gallows Hill ; and she stooped and picked up a wild-flower—a bit of red campion it was—from the foot of the trees. Without waiting for his answer—if he had intended to answer—she presented him with the fragment of blossom, and said in rather an offhand way—

“Will you wear it ? But it is not good enough for to-morrow—you would want something far better for your coat if you were to come along to-morrow, after the church is out, and walk up and down to look at the people. Maybe Jessie and me we would be out too ; and it is very nice to see a young man have a flower in his coat.”

“I do not care about wearing such things,” he said ; “but this little gift of yours, Barbara, I can treasure.” And therewith he took out his pocket-book, and carefully placed the scrap of weed in it. Nor even now would he speak unguardedly : though the mysterious magnetism of her presence—the fascination of the movement of her dress even—was stealing over him and enthralling his senses ; and wild indeed were the hopes that were thronging thick into his brain.

Then again, when they had reached the summit of the hill, and gone along and sate down on the circular bench at the foot of the flagstaff—it was a calm and summer-like scene that lay stretched out before them, from Dun-da-gu and the far Glashven in the north round to the silver-grey peaks of Cruachan in the east—then again she said :

“It is very strange that you should be so different from

other young men, and your ways so different ; but maybe it is better that you are so busy with your studies and your classes ; for Jessie she is always speaking of the great and proud position you are to have, and I hope soon. Oh, yes, I hope soon ; and it is a fine thing to be ambitious, and have people talk about you——”

“There are other things of perhaps greater importance in human life,” he interposed ; but that was all ; he would not startle her away from him by any passionate appeal : it sufficed that she allowed him to be near her, to be even tremblingly conscious of the touch of her gown, on this morning of marvels.

“Barbara,” he said, presently, “do you remember the night the *Sanda* struck on the Lady Rock ? I was up here that night. It was from here that I saw the white things shoot up into the black sky ; and many’s the time since then I have thought that they were a sort of message from you to me.”

“And what could you be doing up here at such an hour ?” said she, indifferently glancing at the wide waters of the bay and the hills.

“Well, I have always been used to going about a good deal by myself,” he answered her, in a more absent tone. “There are many matters that a man has to thresh out, and the night is the best time for thinking : the dark is quiet. It is well for you that you have not to face these problems and perplexities. All you have to do is to look beautiful and winning—that is your place in nature—that is enough ; and if you add to that the showing a little kindness here and there, then you become of quite inestimable value to the people around you. Look at my own case,” he went on, “look at what you have done for me this morning. I hardly cared whether I went away for two years or stayed at home ; but if you take any interest in these poor affairs of mine, then it would be very different, then it would be worth considering. A single word from you—would be enough——”

“Oh, as for that,” she said, somewhat saucily, “I do not know that I could be interfering. My aunt and Jessie would tell you that I was too stupid and ignorant to understand about the ambitions of a young man——”

"There are other hopes of far more importance," he said, hastily. "Barbara, don't you understand that you have brought them all back to me again, through your friendliness of this morning? But—but I will not alarm you; that would be a poor return. I will not even ask you to say the word that would keep me in this country."

"I was only telling you what I was hearing," she replied, evasively, "that it would be a great sacrifice for you to give up your classes—and your friends would be sorry you went away——"

"And would you be sorry, too, Barbara?" he asked, making bold to regard her.

"I would be like the others, I suppose," she answered, toying with the black bugles that adorned the front of her dress.

But this maiden coyness did not deceive or discourage him; on the contrary, his heart was filled with a transport that seemed to demand utterance, in spite of his rigorous self-restraint.

"Barbara," said he, of a sudden, "I have decided I will not accept the tutorship. I will remain where I am, and get on with my classes, and have a word now and again with one or two friends I care for. And it's many thanks to you for concerning yourself about such poor trifles."

She rose.

"I must be going now," she said.

"But, Barbara," he protested—for he could not let her return to the town without seeking to secure a continuance of her favour, without bargaining for a repetition of this bewildering and enchanting interview, "you must tell me when I am to see you again."

"Well, to-morrow, then," she answered, cheerfully, "if you come along the front, after the churches are out. And I will be looking for some one wearing a very nice flower in his coat, for you must not forget that."

Nay, so kind was she, and such an interest did she show in his affairs, that, as they walked back into Duntroone together, she even ventured to remonstrate with him about his costume—which was of a simple, plain, workaday character; and she hinted that on special occasions, such as the next day's after-church promenade, he ought to dress

like the fashionable young men, who on Sundays wore coloured kid gloves and smart neckties, and tall hats. Allan laughed and shook his head; but all the same he was exceedingly grateful to her for her advice; indeed, when he had bade farewell to her at the entrance to the house in Campbell Street, and turned to come away again, so overjoyed was he, so happily in love with all the world was he, that a vague and general wish possessed him to give somebody something. And the first person that he chanced to encounter was Niall Gorach.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FOOL'S REVENGE.

NIALL was in a sorry plight. His clothes were dishevelled and smothered with dust; his face was scratched and bruised; and the palms of his hands, and his wrists, which he ruefully regarded from time to time, were torn and bleeding.

“What’s all this now?” said the schoolmaster.

Then the half-witted lad told his tale. He had been outside the town, at the foot of the Dunach hill when the Melfort coach came along. On the top of it was a certain farmer-youth named Dan Kingarra—that is Dan of the Kingarra farm—with one or two of his companions; and it occurred to this facetious person that he would invite Niall to get up beside them, no doubt for purpose of providing them with sport. Things appeared to have gone on well enough while they were slowly ascending the hill, and driving along the level summit; but when they were rapidly descending the steep incline on the townward side, the motive of Dan Kingarra’s kindness became clear. He would have Niall jump off behind—while the coach was tearing down the hill; and this the poor chap was eventually compelled to do, with the inevitable consequences: he was hurled along the stony highway, face downward, his hands and wrists shot out in vain, while the lout of a farmer,

ensconced among his companions, laughed aloud at the merry jest.

"If I had been there," said the schoolmaster, with a flash of flame in his dark eyes, "I'd soon have had that tom-fool headfirst into the road. There would have been a second one rolling among the stones."

"Maybe," said Niall, slowly, "maybe something will be coming to him, and before long."

"Well, here is a shilling for you, anyway," the schoolmaster continued, goodnaturedly, "and you can go into the chemist's and get some lint and some ointment for your hands. No," said he, on second thoughts—for had not this poor lad done him a good turn when he was hopelessly immured in the chasm?—"No; you can keep the shilling; but you'd better come along with me to the doctor, and we'll get the thing done properly for you." And to the doctor's they accordingly went; and there Niall was patched and mended up as well as might be; and presently Allan Henderson was again on his way home—his brain filled with recollections that had little to do with Niall Gorach.

But when Niall was once more his own master he resumed his apparently aimless wanderings, and these in due course of time led him to the neighbourhood of the Kingarra farm, which lay just outside the town. Here he became more circumspect; he crept and slouched along by the side of walls and hedges; and when he came to the iron gate leading into the farm-yard, he hid behind a clump of elder-bushes—which had doubtless been planted there in former days for the confusion of ghosts and evil spirits. From this safe retreat, he could command a view—through the slender spars of the gate—of all that was happening in the large and open square, that was surrounded by the usual buildings and outhouses.

Then a little while thereafter Niall withdrew from his hiding, and cautiously and circuitously returned to Duntroone; and the first place he made for was Long Lanchie's shop. The shoemaker was at work, or pretending to be at work; but there was a confused and yet half-comical look about his eyes, when he glanced up and saw who his visitor was, that seemed to suggest that Lanchlan must have of late been straying from the strait and narrow path. And

it was not at all in his usual gloomy tones that he now exclaimed, in Gaelic—

“Is it you, you grandson of the Witch of Endor!—and I am of opinion by the look of you that you have been in the wars!”

Niall answered him in the same tongue :

“Will you be lending me a long piece of cord, Mr. MacIntyre, and a bit of rosin to make it dark?”

“And what devil’s cantrip is this now?—and who has been pulling a harrow over you?”

“Will you give me the string?” said the lad with the curious, peering, elfin eyes. “When the woman was here, it was I that frightened her away for you.”

“My hero, do you think I am forgetting?” said Lauchie, with an inhuman chuckle. “Aw Dycea, many is the time I have been laughing over that; ay, and waking up in the middle of the night, laughing. Oh, you are the champion of the sorcerers, and no mistake; and I am sure she ran all the way shrieking to Fort William—and swimming over Cowal Ferry and Creran Ferry. And if she was drowned, who will be crying over it?—if she is drowned, she is silent; and a silent woman is a very good thing, that Providence does not always give us. And maybe I will be for letting you have the string, if you will tell me what you are going to do with it, and if you will tell me who has been injuring you.”

Thereupon Niall—without whimpering, but with a malignant glitter in his eyes—repeated the story he had related to the schoolmaster, and Lauchlan promptly said—

“Well, it is myself that would like to be giving that fellow a bash on the head. But what about the string now—what about the string, son of my heart?”

“I was up at the farm,” said Niall, slowly and darkly. “I was looking at the yard. In the middle of it there is a great barrel to drain the byres and the stables; and the top of the barrel is even with the ground. If I was to tie the string to the pump, and be hidden somewhere with the other end, then maybe Big Dan would be coming along, and I would pull the string, and trip him——”

“And he would fall into the barrel of wash?” cried Lauchie—and instantly he threw aside his work. “May

the Good Being preserve us, but I would walk half round the world to see such a thing as that! Niall, it is your head that has the invention in it. Do not mind them if they say you were not at home when the sense was shared; you have as much sense as many; and it is I that will be laughing when I see Dan Kingarra fall into the wash. Do you know now what colour he will be when he scrambles out? he will be as brown as treacle; and not a curse coming from him, for his mouth will be choking. Aw, the brown man!—Niall, I am going with you to see the brown man!—I would not miss it for the best part of my existence.”

Long Lauchie was softly chuckling and giggling to himself as he set about getting the twine and the rosin; but by the time he was ready to start, he had grown solemn again. He opened a press, and took down a black bottle and a soda-water bottle; and the latter he filled from the former.

“Niall,” said he, “I will give you advice. Maybe you have not as much wisdom as others; but I will tell you how you can make up for it; and what you must do is to keep away from the drink. It is drink that is the ruin of half of them around you; and if you keep away from it, you will be the equal of many, sense or no sense. For myself now, I was taking a drop or two to-day—the toothache being such a terrible, terrible thing.” He put the soda-water bottle to his lips, and had a long pull; then, with a sigh of satisfaction, he corked the flask and placed it in his pocket. “Keep away from the drink, Niall, and there is no fear of you: it is drink that is the scourge and disgrace of this country—a sad, sad thing to think of!”

But then again, as they were on their way to Kingarra, on this shining afternoon, his spirits recovered considerably; and although his toothache seemed to be troubling him at times—and he had to seek the necessary relief—he by-and-bye became quite gay.

“Niall,” said he—and he was quietly laughing now—“did you ever behold a brown man? I am thinking that a brown man will be a sight to see! Do you not imagine that his pockets will be very wet when he will put his hands into them——”

"Maybe," said Niall, "maybe he will not be for pushing me off a coach again."

"Aw, the brown man," continued Lauchie—and he could not restrain his hilarity—"the brown man!—it is I that will be laughing to see the brown man climb up out of the barrel, and if he will be using bad words, would not you do the same? No, not you, not you, Niall, my son; for there are many things you must avoid; and the two things that you must avoid most of all are the drink and the women. The drink I have told you about; and the women—well, now, my hero, perhaps it is not so bad for you to be a little weak in the head, if that will keep the women away from you. Anything to keep them away from you; for they are the devil's own children, and no mistake; and I wish he had the lot of them, and would keep them at home with himself. I am not saying," proceeded Lauchlan, "that you may not find one here and there that is pleasing to look at—so long as you do not marry her; it is the marrying that is the mischief. Aw, yes, I have seen one or two; I had my young days; well I remember that some of the girls were not always so shy and innocent as you might think, when there was a bunch of nettles to be put in your bed, and a ghost waiting for you behind the door. We had the fine evenings those evenings." Here Long Lauchie, moved to sentiment by his recollections, burst into gentle melody; but there was not much of sadness—there was rather triumph—in his singing:

*"Twas on a simmer's afternoon,
A wee before the sun gaed down,
My lassie, in a braw new gown,
Cum' o'er the hills to Gourie."*

Lauchlan, looking all round the landscape, smiled mysteriously at these reminiscences of his. But presently he resumed:

"Oh, yes, I tell you, my brave champion, I have seen many pretty girls in my time, brown-haired, and yellow-haired, and black-haired; and all of them so smooth-spoken and pleasing; and giving themselves airs as if they had the tail of a peacock to display. But it is a different thing—and now I am telling you the Bible truth—it is a very

different thing when you take one of them and make a wife of her, and then the devil's daughter lets you know where she came from. Niall, my boy, you will be saved from all that, as it is my hope; and you will be thankful to Providence that you are a little weak in the head. Not that I am so sure about that either. For I have heard of the great commanders—I have heard of Wellington, and Lord Raglan, and Colin Campbell that was at the Alma; but could any one of them have driven that fearful woman fleeing out of the house? Not one of them; they would have run away themselves; and the faster they went the better for them—that is my opinion. But you—it is you that have a head on your shoulders—and plenty of invention in it—and no mistake! And now we will see if we can make the farmer's son dance—aw, Dycea, how I am wishing to see the brown man climbing out of the barrel!”

At this point Lauchlan began to moderate his too garrulous mirth; for they were getting near to Kingarra; and he understood from Niall's stealthy and furtive manner that there might be some danger of their being observed. But they reached the shelter of the elder-bushes in safety; and then it was that Lauchlan, out of thankfulness—or perhaps owing to another twinge of toothache—brought forth the soda-water bottle again. At present there was nothing else to be done, for there was an old woman in possession of the farm-yard—an old woman in a red jacket who was hurling stones and execrations at a terrier that she had caught in the act of scattering a brood of young turkeys.

But in a minute or two, when the old woman had disappeared into one of the out-houses, Niall stole from his hiding-place; and after a careful and cat-like scrutiny he clambered over the gate. He went quickly across the square. In the middle, towards which four shallow troughs—one from each corner of the yard—sloped down and converged, there was a huge tun, the top of which was flush with the ground; while on the further side rose an iron pump. To this pump Niall rapidly affixed one end of the rosined cord, and then he retreated, paying out the string, and dabbing it down on the earth and stones so that it should be immovable and invisible. When he came crouching back behind the elder-bushes, he had the other

end in his hand ; at any moment a powerful jerk would raise the darkened twine some two or three inches from the ground, so that an unwary passer-by must inevitably go over.

And as it chanced the very next person to put in an appearance was the farmer's son—a great hulking lout of a fellow—who had a pitchfork over his shoulder. The shoemaker, holding his breath, was sniggering in spite of himself ; but his companion was in a different mood—the strange, elfin eyes were burning with fire—they were like the eyes of some wild animal intently watching its prey. The unhappy thing was that though the lumbering, heavy-shouldered youth seemed to have plenty of half-idle jobs to do about the yard, never once did he approach the drainage barrel ; if he crossed the string, it was at such a distance from the black hole that tripping him up would have been of no avail. They waited and watched, and waited and watched ; but with a maddening persistence he kept away from the neighbourhood of that most unholy well. At last Long Lauchie whispered—

“ Niall, my son, it is you that have the invention ; but this time it is not going to succeed——”

“ Quiet—quiet ! ” retorted the half-witted lad, trembling with excitement. “ Now he is coming—now—now——”

But again the unsuspecting yokel sheered off ; and at this Lauchie rose from his cramped position.

“ Niall,” he said, laughing covertly, “ now I will take my turn ; for it is into that hole the devil must go somehow. Stay where you are—stay where you are, my son—and maybe you will be seeing something.”

He now issued boldly from his ambush ; he opened the gate ; he staggered into the yard. Perhaps he was pretending to be a good deal more intoxicated than was really the case ; he held the almost empty bottle in his hand ; he swayed up to the farmer's son—who regarded this intruder with evident disfavour.

“ It is not ahl feenished yet,” said Lauchie, in English. “ Will you be for having a drop ?—I was on my weh home—and how is your father, Dan ?—ay, and your mother too ?—”

“ Oh, what are you bletherin about ! ” returned the other,

with impatient sulkiness. "My mother has been dead these seven years——"

"Ay, that's what I was thinking," Lauchie went on, most good-naturedly—though his speech was interrupted now and again by an occasional hiccough. "And—and I'm glad to hear that; and you will give her my compliments, and tell her that I was asking after her. And you will hef a drop with me now—it is not ahl feenished——"

"I am not tasting," was the morose answer.

"Well, well, then, there's the more for me," said Lanchlan, cheerfully, and he put the bottle in his pocket. "And your father now, is he well?—and your mother—are they both of them pretty well?——"

"Oh, get out of this—get away home!" was the scornful rejoinder.

"And I was hearing of you to-day," proceeded Lauchie. "I was hearing of the fine trick you were playing on Niall Gorach—and—and he would be rolling along the road like a football——"

The big booby condescended to grin. But of a sudden Lanchlan grew preternaturally grave.

"Maybe," said he, half articulately, "maybe I was having a drop too much the day. Give me your arm, Dan, my lad—give me your arm to the gate—I am wishing to get away home——"

"Ay, the sooner ye're in bed the better," answered the facetious bumpkin; but by this time Lauchie had fastened on to him, and rather unwillingly he was being dragged across the yard.

"Here, do ye want to drown yourself!" he exclaimed angrily, as Lauchie's reeling and staggering took them both dangerously near the pump.

The next moment the intoxicated shoemaker gave a heavy lurch forward—his companion was thrown over and could not recover himself—there was a mighty souse and a kicking and splashing—and the last that Lauchie saw of the farmer was a pair of hands frantically clinging to the edge of the unspeakable tun. He made away for the gate, and haled Niall Gorach out of his hiding-place.

"Aw, Dyceca, did you see that now?" he cried, as they hastened along the road—and he laughed and better

laughed until he brought on the hiccough so violently that it threatened to choke him. "Niall, my son, hurry, hurry; but as soon as we are near the houses we are safe; for you do not think a brown man would come near the houses? The brown man—aw, the brown man!—it is I who would like to see him chasing us through Duntroone, and his clothes dripping, and all the people standing and laughing. And what do you think, now, my hero?—he was very clever when he pushed you down from the coach—oh, yes, he was very clever—but maybe he is not considering himself so clever now. What do you say to that, my son?"

"Will he get any of it into his mouth?" said Niall Gorach, with his eyes burning again.

But the shoemaker was not in the least inclined to be vindictive. He was far too happy. He was giggling to himself, and singing little snatches of song, all the way in to Duntroone; and when he arrived he made straight for one of his favourite howffs, sure of finding there on a Saturday evening some particular crony, to whom, over a friendly glass or two, he could relate his exploit, with such mirthful embellishments as happened to occur to him. And thus it was that Niall Gorach was avenged.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PERPLEXITIES.

WHEN the two Maclean girls came out of church on the following day, Jess seemed disinclined to accede to Barbara's proposal that they should go for a stroll along the sea-front; indeed, at this time of the year, when the hotels and villas were filled with visitors, the townspeople mostly kept away from the fashionable throng.

"Do you want to see some one?" Jessie demanded. "Or do you wish to have your head turned with fine bonnets and the new style of jackets? I never knew the like of you, Barbara, for thinking about dress."

"I do not wish to sit in the house all day reading books," said Barbara, resentfully.

"Oh, well, I will go with you," said Jess, with her usual good-nature. "I need not be over shy ; they're not likely to look much at me, Barbara, when they've you to look at."

But hardly had they got down to the front when Jess exclaimed—

"Why, there is Allan ! Who would have expected to find him here !"

At the same moment Barbara's face flushed with vexation. For where was the flower she had counselled him to wear in his button-hole ; and where were the smart gloves and the tall hat ? He did not seem to have altered his dress in any one particular ; he had taken no trouble to fit himself for this promenade ; it was as if he had risen from his musty books and come out without a thought of appearances. And this was the result—that she had dressed herself in her best—and brought her scarlet sunshade too—to walk up and down with a long, gawky, ill-attired student.

When he came up she received him with the most marked coldness ; she would hardly look his way ; she left him to talk to Jess—while she regarded, covertly, the people passing to and fro along the parade. And it was in this fashion also that these three set out together—keeping rather to the roadway, for the gay world had possession of the pavement. Allan could not but be conscious of the inexplicable change in her manner ; but he did not betray either surprise or chagrin ; while Jessie remained kind as always.

"I finished the Memoirs this morning," said she, "and I will send you the book back to-morrow, with many thanks."

"And what do you think of the great Benvenuto ?" he asked.

"I would not like to say anything disrespectful," Jess answered, demurely, "but—but I was thinking to myself once or twice that 'aiblins he was a leear.' Do you remember," she went on, with a laugh—and she had a pretty laugh, quiet, and happy, and humorous—"do you remember the story of the salamander ? He says that when he was a small boy he saw a salamander in the fire ; and that there and then his father struck him a blow on the side of the head, so that he should never forget it. That is

his story. But I suspect what really happened was this—that he declared he saw a salamander ; and that there and then his father hit him on the side of the head to try to cure him of lying. Isn't that the more likely story, Allan ? ”

“ Indeed it is,” said he. “ And you're quite right : we've got to guess at what really happened in former times. How do you think, now, that Socrates came by his broken nose ? ”

“ His wife ? ” Jess suggested vaguely.

“ No, no. It is perfectly clear what happened. Socrates had got hold of an honest citizen, and right or wrong, would engage him in argument, just for showing off. Then the poor man, finding himself being driven into a corner by a mere trick of logic—feeling that he was being entrapped, and yet not clever enough to get out—and not liking to be bullied and made a fool of before his friends—then he got angry : he up with his fist and gave the philosopher a bloody nose. That was the *argumentum ad hominem*, you see ; and I suppose Socrates thought he had had enough for that day.”

Benvenuto Cellini—Socrates : no wonder Barbara ceased to listen ; and turned away with proud indifference from her two companions ; and devoted her attention to the fashionable crowd, whose costume, and gait, and bearing had ever and always for her the profoundest interest. She was accustomed to being left by herself in this way. When those two got together, there seemed to be no end to the subjects on which they could talk ; while she was relegated to silence. And perhaps on this particular morning—seeing that every now and again she was aware of a scrutinising glance sent across from the passers-by—perhaps it was just as well that Allan Henderson should pass for Jess's especial friend ; his appearance (in Barbara's eyes) did not confer distinction on his associate for the time being.

Indeed, she got away from this too public thoroughfare as soon as ever she could ; and the moment she and Jess were back home again and in the seclusion of their own room, her petulance broke forth.

“ He was a fine-like sight to come walking with any one ! ” she said, in mingled wrath and scorn.

"Do you mean Allan?" said Jess, wondering. "He was just as usual."

"But people are not supposed to be dressed as usual," retorted Barbara, "when they go along the esplanade on a Sunday."

"Dressed?" repeated her cousin, rather angrily. "He was well enough dressed. He was perfectly well dressed. And, in any case, those that know Allan will not judge of him by his coat."

"And how is a stranger to judge of him except by his coat?" demanded Barbara; she did not notice that Jessie's fair and fine complexion had acquired an unusual touch of colour.

"If a stranger," said Jess, with proud lips, "does not see that Allan Henderson is a man of strong and remarkable character—if he does not see that in every line of his face—then the stranger is a fool. And the opinion of a fool is not worth considering."

"Oh, you need not get into a temper," observed Barbara, tauntingly. "It would be of better use if you lent the schoolmaster a clothes-brush."

"His clothes are perfectly well brushed," said Jess, hotly, "and perfectly becoming. Perfectly becoming! I wish I could say as much for every one who was there this morning. For there are people who deck themselves out above their station, in imitation of their betters."

It was a cruel speech—and utterly unlike Jess: nay, she stopped abruptly and hesitated. After all, this cousin of hers had been thrown upon their generosity and hospitality; and she was a solitary kind of creature.

"Barbara," Jess went on, after this momentary pause, "I am sorry I said that. I was not meaning it. You provoked me."

"Oh, you may say what you like," replied Barbara, with assumed indifference, as she put the red parasol down at the bottom of the drawer and covered it over; "it is an old story—that nobody must utter a word about the schoolmaster if you are anywhere near by."

That same evening Allan Henderson was alone in his own room, seated at an open window, and plunged in profound meditation. For there were many problems he

had to face at this crisis. His reason was battling for the mastery ; and was pointing out to him that if he wished to withdraw from what he vaguely felt to be a false position, Barbara's inexplicably capricious conduct offered an opportune excuse. Even in the midst of his infatuation—even as he dreaded to think of losing her—he was haunted by a distressing consciousness that she was in no sense his equal, that she was not the mate he would have chosen if there had been a choice in the matter. But was there a choice ? Or was the pairing of men and women a haphazard thing ; and was its accidental character the cause of all the mistakes and tragedies that were visible around ? And what was the nature of this subtle allurements and fascination that was so much more powerful than the will of a man, and that paid no heed whatever to his judgment ? But then again, if he was driven to confess to himself that Barbara could be no intellectual helpmeet for him—that she was ignorant and simple in a hundred directions—might not that be part of her mysterious charm ? Here was a child of nature, to be taken by the hand and led ; here was a virgin tablet on which the finer wisdom of the world could be written anew ; here was a wild blossom, to be trained and guided, while one wonderingly watched its growth. And after all, was not the over-riding of reason—the yielding to a blind intoxication of the senses—at a particular juncture in life—was not that but obeying one of the fundamental laws of existence ? Who could tell but that there were other powers at work in this business of selection—inscrutable and inexorable powers ? Could there be any sorer spectacle than that of some poor item of humanity, hanging back, consulting his judgment, with “ I will—I will not,” while the inherited influences of millions of centuries were imperatively saying to him, “ There is the woman we have chosen for you : her you must seek to gain, and none other. If you fail, then you have balked our purpose—away with you to the limbo of discomfiture and despair ! ”

These dark and intricate communings were broken in upon : Mr. McFadyen appeared—merry eyed, alert, self-confident.

“ Well, to be sure ! ” he exclaimed. “ All by yourself, on

a fine evening like this ! I made sure you would be entertaining your friends at supper, or something of the kind, after what I saw yesterday. Did I not prophesy it, many's the day ago ? And a smart young madam to go walking through the town wi' !—Dod, she's a clipper !—there's style about her, I tell ye—a regular young Queen of Sheba——”

“Are you talking of Barbara Maclean ?” said the school-master. “But that was twenty-four hours ago. And twenty-four hours in the life of a woman——”

“What—what now ?” cried the councillor, in great surprise : he could see that something had occurred.

“I saw her this morning,” said Allan, briefly. “She had hardly a word for me.”

“Man, man, is that all ?” responded Peter, with hearty cheerfulness. “Do ye no understand ? That's only their tricks, man ! They're all like that. They're well aware that if they kept aye in the same temper, they would lose interest for ye ; and so one day it's all smiles and sunshine, and the next day it's nothing but discontent and perversity. Come away, now—come away this very minute ; and we'll go along to the widow's——”

Well, Allan was in a half-reckless mood ; he hardly knew what was happening to him, what toils and snares were surrounding him. They went to the widow's. And from her, at least, they had a most friendly welcome.

“And so the holidays begin to-morrow, Allan, lad,” said she. “I'm sure they'll do you good : you've been too hard at work at your classes. And how is your greenhouse getting on, Mr. McFadyen ?”

“Oh, fine ; just fine,” responded the councillor. “There's some may be laughing at me for keeping a bit green-house, and a few out-of-door plants cheek by jowl with a coal-yard ; but if they had any philosophy they would know it's just there such a thing is wanted. A touch of verdure—a touch of verdure—it's wonderful how refreshing to the eye it is. And the euonymus bushes are doing well—it's strange they have not oftener been tried in this climate—I'm looking forward to having them green all through the winter. That's the only drawback about the tree-fuchsias—withering down in the winter——”

"It's quite true what ye say, Mr. McFadyen," observed the widow, placidly. "And one o' these days I must come along and look at your anonymous bushes, when it's such an interesting experiment——"

"The sooner the better," returned the councillor, politely. "The sooner the better. And in the meantime I am going to insist on Miss Jessie and Miss Barbara here putting on their things and coming away for half-an-hour's stroll: it's just sinful they should be sitting indoors on so splendid an evening."

And he did insist—stormily, overbearingly—until he had his way; Jess was the first to give a laughing consent; then she and Barbara quitted the room to get ready. When the four of them by-and-bye set out, the councillor was quite gay and triumphant; and it ought to be added that he wore a most dapper and summerlike costume—white vest, cutaway coat, and variegated necktie. They left the town by the Dunstaffnage road—making for the upland heights overlooking the western and northern seas.

They walked two and two; and the schoolmaster, who had at first been inclined to coldness if not to austerity, very speedily found, and that greatly to his surprise, that his companion wished to be complaisant, and even ingratiating.

"You have never told me," said she, in rather a low voice, when there was some little space between them and the couple ahead of them, "of the fight between you and Ogilvie. I want to know. How did it begin?"

It was the very last thing in the world he would have wished to talk about; but she was insidiously persistent; she betrayed the strangest curiosity about the smallest details: however reluctantly, he was forced to relate to her, bit by bit, what had occurred.

"And you had him at the very edge?" she asked, with 'glowering' eyes.

"It was too near for both of us."

"But he was the undermost—you had the mastery over him?" she demanded.

He would not say.

"He was the undermost—did you not tell me that?" she demanded again.

"Well—he was."

"Then why did you not let him go over?" she said, with set teeth.

He was astounded.

"Barbara, do you know what you are saying! Would you have had murder committed?"

"It would have been no murder!" she said, passionately. "It was a fair fight—he would have had you over if he could. Well, maybe you will be serving him better some other day—and more to the purpose!"

He could not understand this savage outburst; but he dared not question her further: for the two in front of them had paused in the roadway, to inquire which route they should now adopt. It was by this time nearly nine; the sun had set; but there was no lack of light—the after-glow seemed to have set the whole world on fire. Indeed, when they had decided to go onwards and downwards to the sea, and when they had reached the heights above Penyfuir, a most extraordinary spectacle lay stretched out before them: the smooth waters of Loch Linnhe were as a lake of blood, the heavens overhead were an indescribable glory of flame, while between the resplendent crimson sea and the dazzling crimson sky stood ranged the mountains of Morven, of the richest, deepest, softest plum-colour, the only apparently solid thing in this wild and general conflagration. The night was yet far off—if there was to be any night; they would have abundant leisure for their return through the woods along the shore.

And so they descended from these uplands to the coast, making their way round by Ganavan and Camas Ban and through the trees that encircle the base of the Castle Hill. The councillor was in great form; he was drawing attention, as if he owned them, to the various objects that came within view; he was displaying his knowledge of natural history. A large dark bird with noiseless wings went sailing from one branch to another; then a sharp, discordant yelp—a strange sound in the prevailing silence—proclaimed the tawny owl. A smaller creature—black as jet against that blaze of crimson light—kept jerkily fluttering over their heads; and Peter repeated the boyish rhyme 'Bat, bat, come into my hat!'; though, having attained to years of wisdom, he did not fruitlessly attempt

to capture the flitter-mouse. A belated weasel stole along the pathway some distance ahead of them, and then disappeared in among the heaps of stones tumbled down from the lofty ruins. But it was when they had got round by the old-fashioned garden to the corner of the bay that the councillor had an opportunity of really distinguishing himself; for at this point a rabbit, closely followed by a black collie, ran across just in front of them, the pursued animal making for the ivied and precipitous cliff underneath the Castle.

"Ah, do you see that now?" cried Mr. McFadyen, grasping his stick by the ferrule end. "That poaching rascal of a dog!—if I could get at him I'd teach him a lesson! The mongrel beasts!—they don't belong to the place—they come in from the town—I wonder the keeper does not shoot every one o' them—and that black thief of a brute, I'd just like to get near it——"

Nay, so indignant was he that he left his companions and began to ascend the steep hill. Both rabbit and collie had got out of sight: no doubt the former had reached the shelter of the ivy, and made its way into one of the numerous crevices well-known in these parts to the coney of the rock. But the dog?—well, the dog must be somewhere about—and here was the valiant Peter, determined on lawful castigation. The next moment McFadyen paused. The black collie having relinquished the chase, was now returning; and when it caught sight of this stranger, it stopped short. The two glared at each other—and Mr. McFadyen did not advance.

"I'm not so sure," he called down to Jess, "that this is a town dog. It may belong to the place, after all——"

There was a low growl, ending in a sharp and menacing bark.

"What do ye think?" the councillor called again. "I would not like to harm a dog that belonged here——"

The barking was renewed, with a more savage accent; the collie, showing angry teeth, was drawing nearer.

"He deserves a thrashing, of course," called Peter, with some tone of apology. "No doubt about that. But—but maybe it would be best to leave that to the keeper. What do ye think? I would not like to harm the dog if I thought it belonged to the place. What do ye think?——"

"Oh, come away, Mr. McFadyen, and leave the dog alone!" Jess called to him.

It was with a certain caution that Peter began to back down the slope; and when he rejoined his companions his face was extremely red—perhaps with the exertion of climbing and descending again.

"I'm not sure I was right in letting him off," he said, doubtfully. "Maybe I was wrong in letting him off. When you catch a poaching dog in the very act, ye should thrash him then and there. But on the other hand, ye see, I would not like to punish a dog that belonged to the place—that would hardly be my business, would it? Oh, well," he concluded, with a magnanimous air, "maybe it was better to let him go for this once anyway: I thought he might have the benefit of the doubt."

"Yes, yes; why should you want to harm the poor beast?" said Jess; and therewith they continued on their route—round by the curve of the shore, towards the out-jutting rocks.

Barbara was silent and self-absorbed on the way home. For while these others had been watching the encounter between Mr. McFadyen and the black collie, she had been regarding the steep cliff that towered away upwards to the ruins of the ancient castle. It was over that cliff that Ogilvie would have fallen headlong if the schoolmaster had not released him and given him his life.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A RING.

NEXT morning, to Barbara's surprise, Allan Henderson presented himself; and the first glimpse she had of him showed her that there was a marked change in his outward appearance—he wore a suit of light grey Harris homespun, and he had discarded his slouched felt hat for a wideawake of the ordinary kind. He at once explained the object of his visit; the summer-school vacation had begun; he was

a free man once more ; and now he wanted to know whether she would not lay aside her work and come away with him for an hour or two's ramble in the country. It was a bold request, truly, considering the capricious and uncertain fashion in which she had been treating him of late ; but perhaps with this newly-found liberty certain daring, or even desperate, hopes and fancies had got hold of him.

She seemed to regard the holiday look—the off-duty look—of his attire with distinct approval.

“ But what is the use of the country ? ” she said. “ There is nothing to see. And it is too early. If you come back about half-past twelve, I can be ready then ; and we will go somewhere.”

He was far too well pleased with her compliance to think of hurrying her ; he went away, and loitered up and down the esplanade, scanning the various yachts ; then at the appointed hour he returned. It was obvious that some portion at least of the interval Barbara had devoted to decorating herself for this expedition. The young Queen of Sheba, as Mr. McFadyen had called her, was well bedight.

Nor had he ever before found her so gracious. They had got but a little way from the house when they came to the chief fruit-and-flower shop in Duntroone ; and here she stopped.

“ Come in for a moment,” said she, “ and I will get you something to wear in your buttonhole.”

“ Thank you, Barbara,” said he, hanging back—with something of an impatient frown as well—“ but I do not care about such things.”

She would not be denied. She bade him wait. She went into the shop, and chose one or two flowers, tying the stems together ; and when she came out again, she herself pinned the little nosegay into the lapel of his coat. He forgot his ill-temper—her kindness was so manifest, and so unexpected.

“ You are no longer a schoolmaster,” she said with a laugh ; “ you are just like the other young men now. And some day when I have enough pocket-money I will be buying you a pair of gloves.”

“ Gloves ? ” he repeated. “ They are not much in my way, Barbara.”

"Ah, but I see that you can make yourself very nice-looking when you choose," she went on. "And now you are no longer the schoolmaster; now it is the holidays; and you will be having plenty of time to dress well and look after yourself when you go out for a walk."

Indeed, she was quite animated; and as they passed round by the harbour and approached the South Pier—to which the *Aros Castle* had just come in—she became still more blithe and communicative. The schoolmaster had not chosen this route; she had, unperceived by him, led the way; it mattered little to him whither they wandered, so long as he and she were together. But on this occasion it became clear that Barbara did not mean to ignore the presence of the Purser. On the contrary, as they were passing the moored steamer, she stared boldly at him—until Ogilvie averted his eyes, and went on with his work; and she talked floutingly and with open scorn; it seemed as though she was not at all unwilling that her taunts should be overheard.

"The poor fellow!" she exclaimed. "No wonder he is angry that he has to look after herring-barrels! He is not much better than a railway-porter—do you think it is being any better than a railway-porter?——"

"Quiet, quiet, Barbara!" her companion said. "Let him alone. You need not look his way, nor he yours."

"Some day will you take Jessie and me for a sail to Tobermory?" she demanded.

In other circumstances he would gladly have welcomed the proposal; but there was something he did not understand about the relations between Barbara and the Purser; a trip to Tobermory—if it was to be on board the *Aros Castle*, with Ogilvie passing to and fro—might involve a good deal of embarrassment. But in the meantime they were leaving the South Pier behind; Barbara, for the sake of her pride, appeared to make some effort to recover her equanimity; and soon they were toiling up the slopes of the Gallows Hill, on their way to the lofty plateau and its spacious view of mountain, cloud, and sea.

And surely this was a day fitted for the allaying of tempestuous passions—now as these two seated themselves on the bench at the foot of the flagstaff; a brooding, calm,

and peaceful day ; nor yet a day of gloom, for the soft, white, woolly skies showed here and there a silvery glow as if the sun were trying to break through the thin transparent veil. There was hardly a breath of wind ; the pale leaden-hued or lilac plain of waters did not stir ; a solitary yacht hung idle off the point of Lismore. The ivied ruins of the Castle were dark and distinct and intense against the luminous heavens ; but the far hills in the west and north seemed to have receded until they had grown aerial and visionary—mere ghosts of mountains. And everywhere a prevailing silence, in which could be heard the throb of the paddles of the steamer, on her way across to the North Pier.

And whither had fled now all the problems, the doubts and hesitations, the perplexities with which he had been torturing himself ? He and she were together, the sweet summer air around them ; the world lay brilliant and beautiful before them ; the mysterious attraction and allure-ment of youth was a trembling and inexplicable delight. And she was bland and complaisant ; a marvellous thing ; he knew not how it had all come about. What did it matter if abstruse mental and moral enigmas were all a blank to her, so long as the wisps and curls of her raven-black hair clung caressingly about her ears and neck, so long as her smile said more than any words, so long as heaven seemed to shine in the liquid deeps of her eyes ? Perhaps she did not know much of the story of dead and gone generations ; but for every man and woman the all-important time was their own time ; the universe for them was the universe in which they found themselves alive ; and here was one who could surround herself—and perhaps a neighbour or two—with an atmosphere of unimaginable glamour. The charm of books, and forgotten languages, and distant peoples ?—there was a stranger charm when she turned her out-curving lashes towards him, timid, shy, half-coquettish as she might chance to be.

Little need was there for talk ; to be so near to her was enough ; and yet the one consuming thought and desire of his mind drove him on to speech.

“Barbara,” he said, in a low voice—for there were one or two people seated on another bench some dozen or fifteen yards away—“you were kind enough to offer me a pair of

gloves. I wish you would accept a little present from me—that would mean more than that—that would mean a good deal more than that——”

“A present?” she repeated—and her eyes were pleased and expectant.

“A ring,” he said. “Would you wear a ring if I gave it to you?”

“Oh, yes,” she answered, without a moment’s hesitation.

“But do you understand?” he went on. “Do you understand what the significance would be?”

The jet-black lashes were lowered now.

“Maybe—I do not know,” she said.

“Well, your wearing the ring would be a promise—a promise that you will be my wife. Will you wear the ring, Barbara?”

“Yes,” she said.

There was no affectation of coyness or fluttering alarm; there was a touch of pride, of defiance almost, in her tone; but in his delirium of happiness he took no heed of such trifles. Nay, so anxious and eager was he to make secure the prize he had thus unexpectedly won—and won in such an amazingly simple fashion—that he would have her go away down with him, there and then, to Mr. Boyd the jeweller’s, that this fateful trinket might straightway be chosen. And Barbara seemed nothing loth; she rose to her feet.

“Will they be thinking it strange?” said she, “if they see me wearing a ring?”

“Why, of course not,” he said, joyfully enough. “An engagement-ring is nothing out of the common. If any one is curious, you can explain; but they will all get to know—and the sooner the better.”

She did not appear to be at all overwhelmed by the gravity of the step she had just taken. As they were going away down and into the town, he was recalling to her certain things that had happened since the night of the wreck of the *Sanda*, to prove to her that this goal he had triumphantly reached at last he had been aiming at all along. But she interrupted him.

“Oh,” she said, “it is no use looking back. All that is gone away and done. The present is enough.”

"Indeed it is," said he. "And it would be marvellous if I were not to think so."

When these two went into the shop, Mr. Boyd, glancing from one to the other, seemed a little astonished; but of course he made no remark; it was only when Allan asked to be shown one or two plain gold rings that the jeweller revealed what was passing in his mind.

"Ay, is it a wedding-ring then?" he asked.

At this Barbara did betray some slight confusion; but Allan stepped in to shield her.

"No, no," said he, goodhumouredly. "Not yet. You're in a hurry, Mr. Boyd. It's only a little present I was thinking of——"

"Oh, yes, to be sure," said the shopkeeper, instantly retreating from his false position, and finding safety in a study of his window, from which he presently extracted a small case of his glittering wares.

Now in the natural course of things it was for Allan to make his choice, subject to her approval; but it very soon appeared that these two were not of one mind in this matter. The schoolmaster's fancy had been attracted by a simple gold hoop—a piece of delicate chain-work set in a narrow band; 18-carat the metal was, and the price marked on the little ticket was twenty-five shillings. But Barbara was clearly disappointed.

"It is so plain," said she, with just a touch of petulance. "It is nothing—no one would notice it——"

"Maybe you would like something more showy?" Mr. Boyd suggested—and he brought out another case. "This is a very nice one."

Well, the ring he now placed before her was certainly a more gandy ornament—it professed to be of rubies and diamonds, the stones alternating; while the ticketed price was only fifteen shillings. When Barbara took it in her hand, her eyes lit up with unmistakeable pleasure.

"Yes," she said, that is something to look at—that is something that can be seen."

"But, Barbara," remonstrated the schoolmaster, almost angrily, "you don't want to wear imitation things, do you? These stones are not real, Mr. Boyd?—of course not, at that price."

"Oh, no; they're imitations; but they're very good imitations," answered the jeweller. "And the setting is gold—12 carat gold."

"It is very pretty, whatever," said Barbara, regarding the bauble with fascinated eyes; and she tried it on her finger to see how it looked there also.

Allan was vexed and chagrined; but how could he quarrel with her on this morning of all mornings? She had just given herself to him—he had just won the crown of life; and was he to refuse her her choice of a trumpery gewgaw?

"Well, if you wish it," he said. "But I should have thought you would have preferred something real—not bits of glass——"

"Then if I am not to have it, I am not to have it," she said, shortly; and she pulled the ring off her finger, and tossed it aside. "Show me some others."

"But if you would rather have it, Barbara——" he was saying, to pacify her, when she again interrupted him.

"I am not caring for it any longer. Some other one—it is no matter which it is."

And eventually a compromise was arrived at. It is true that the ring she ultimately accepted cost more than either of the others—cost him well over a week's salary; but at least the rosette of garnets which it bore consisted of genuine stones. And there certainly was more display in this deep crimson ornament than in the plain gold hoop that he had at first offered her.

They did not continue their expedition further at this time; but before they parted, Allan promised to come along in the evening: he was impatient to let Mrs. Maclean and Jessie know of the great change that had taken place in his fortunes and prospects. They were to learn of it before then. On her way home Barbara called in at the shop; and Jess, from behind the counter, was not slow in desecring the pretty trinket.

"Well, Barbara, you are the one for setting yourself off!" she exclaimed. "And where did you get such a beautiful thing as that?"

"The schoolmaster," said Barbara, with a laugh and a blush.

Jess was silent only for a second.

"Then—then it is settled between him and you?" she asked, diffidently.

"Oh, yes, we are to be married," replied Barbara—still regarding the ring. "Will you tell your mother, Jessie, that Allan is coming along to-night?"

"Yes, I will tell her. But—but don't you expect me to say something, Barbara? For I am sure I wish that both of you may be very happy—I am sure I wish that."

"And I am sure of this," said the girl—touched by the tone in which these words were spoken—"I am sure of this, Jessie, that no one can say you are not very kind to those about you." And therewith she left.

All that long afternoon—after she had confided these tidings to her mother—the ordinarily light-hearted Jess was strangely pre-occupied and silent.

"It is my head—it is nothing," she would say, in answer to her mother's inquiries; and then again she would struggle on with her accounts.

But at last she gave up.

"Would you mind attending to the shop, mother?" she said, with rather a tired air. "I would like to go for a little walk——"

"But you will be back when Allan calls?" the widow said. "He will be expecting your congratulations——"

"Yes, maybe I will be back," Jess said. "Maybe. But if I am not, you will give him my best wishes, mother, and tell him I hope they will both be very happy. But he knows that—he knows that is what I am wishing for both of them."

And so she got away; and by unfrequented paths she stole out into the moorland country, where she was alone, and glad to be alone. For perhaps 'the foolishness was on her;' and if the 'wild tears' must fall, she would not have any one know her shame.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ON A SUMMER'S EVENING.

To no one was the great news more welcome than to the councillor, who saw in it but another step towards the realisation of his own far-reaching schemes. And to celebrate the event, and perhaps—for certain dark reasons—to familiarise Jess with the spectacle of a pair of affianced lovers, he came bustling along on the following afternoon, and would have the schoolmaster and the two girls go away with him for a sail in Angus MacIsaac's boat, the *Kelpie*. There was a fine brisk breeze blowing; they would adventure out into the golden regions of the west; and the clear twilight would bring them home.

Well, there was nothing of the spoil-sport about Jess Maclean: if, on some rare occasion, the 'foolishness' got hold of her, then she took care to hide herself away in solitude. Moreover these were Allan's holidays; and during the working times of the year there was little enough diversion for him. So Jess at once and cheerfully put on her smartest things; Barbara did the same; the schoolmaster was summoned; and the councillor, having marshalled his forces, proceeded to escort them down to the sea-front. He was in the noblest of spirits; it was as if he were leading them on to the conquest of Mexico or the capture of the last of the Ineas.

Unfortunately, when they reached the esplanade, they found that the *Kelpie* was away somewhere, and Angus with her; but there was an alternative cutter, the *Osprey*, lying at her moorings; and MacIsaac's representative, a young lad named Malcolm, was on the beach. To do this youth justice, he seemed to hesitate a little about the responsibility of letting the boat; but Mr. McFadyen, in his stormily heroic mood, would take no refusal.

"You'll come with us, man," he exclaimed, "and at least ye know how to manage the things at the bow. I'll do the rest; we'll get on splendid; anybody can sail a boat on a

fine summer evening like this. Oh, I know something about a boat—I've kept my eyes open—you'll see we'll just get on splendid."

He would have no hanging back; he carried everything before him; he had himself and his companions pulled out in a dingay; they got on board; and the councillor straightway took up his post at the tiller. Columbus, calm and resolved in face of his insurgent followers, could not have looked more imposing. It is true he regarded the movements of the youth Malcolm with a curiosity not unminged with impatience; for, the commander being at the helm, why was nothing going forward—why was not the vessel making response? But at length Malcolm got the little half-decked cutter slipped from her moorings; and she began to creep slowly away before the wind.

It was an altogether auspicious setting-out; for although there was a stormy look about the skies—the 'sun had set up his backstays' over the western hills, the spreading rays of light striking downwards from the moving clouds—there was nothing to denote that the breeze would remain otherwise than benign and steady: the prospect was that after a pleasant run through the wild sunset-fires they would come gliding back through the still more wonderful afterglow, to walk homeward in the pearly dusk. There was at this starting only one little mischance.

"Am I trusting my life to you, Mr. McFadyen?" Jess happened to say, blithely, as she made herself a snug seat in the cockpit.

"Ay, Miss Jessie," he answered her, "I wish ye would do that for altogether."

But the confusion caused by this inadvertent remark was only momentary; Jess pretended to have heard nothing; while Peter McFadyen was now, and rather angrily, trying to make out what the youth Malcolm meant by certain bashfully-suggested hints.

"Will I haul up the main tack, sir?"

"What's that ye say?"

"Will I haul up the main tack?"

"Oh, we're doing well enough—we're doing fine!" said Peter, fretfully—of course he did not like being interrupted in his task of entertaining his companions.

Nevertheless the youth—shy and diffident as he was—would still interfere. He came aft.

“Will I slack out the boom a bit more, sir?”

“We’re doing fine—we’re doing fine, I tell ye!” retorted Peter with obvious irritability. “You go and attend to the things at the bow; I’ll manage the rest.”

Malcolm was a biddable lad. He went forward again. He only ventured to say, as he stood by the mast—

“Will I hoist the foresail, sir?”

“What?” bawled Peter.

“Will I hoist the foresail?”

“Oh, hoist your grandmother! Do ye not see that we’re just flecin’?”

And, indeed, they were just fleeing. For the wind was from the east; and now that they were getting out from the bay, the gusts from over the cliffs struck frequent and hard, so that the *Osprey* went tearing along at an admirable pace, the foam churning at her bows. And Jess was merry; and the councillor was delighted; and Barbara could show off her ring, with its rosette of garnets; the schoolmaster alone seemed to have doubts about the wisdom, and the possible result, of this performance.

“I say, my friend,” he observed to the steersman, “this is all very well, but how are we going to get back? Don’t you think we’d better keep up to windward—and try along the Sound, if you like——”

“Down the Sound of Kerrara—and a squally east wind blowing?” cried Peter, with explosive hilarity. “Na, na—not me! I wasua born yesterday! It’s just the very mischief when the squalls come down on ye in the Sound; whereas here we’re in the open; and if there’s anything to make a bother, ye can see it before it strikes ye. Man, it’s a fine thing to feel a boat just flecin’ beneath ye! And an east wind’s a land wind; where can the trouble be?—tell me that! Come, Miss Jessie, sing us a song, now! Ay, you can sing, for all that you’re so blate about it, and it’s so difficult to get ye to open your month. We’re just flecin’. It’s a fine boat, this. Give us a song, Miss Barbara—come, now! A fine boat—she answers to the helm just as if she was a living thing. I tell ye, it’s a grand thing to be in a healthy climate like this—I could near sing a song myself——”

"We're all waiting for you, Mr. McFadyen!" said Jess.

"Ay, and do ye want me to make an ass of myself?" demanded Peter. "Well, I will. I would rather make an ass of myself than not keep the thing going, when I'm out on a frolic of this kind. What is it to be? Dod, I'll make an ass of myself, if ye like——"

"Why every one knows you sing very well, Mr. McFadyen," said Jess, with not a thought of sarcasm in her mind.

"I'll tell ye a good one now," said Mr. McFadyen—and his small, roguish eyes were twinkling mirthfully, "a real good one. There was a chap I knew and he was boasting of his fine teeth, and says he, 'I never once beheld the face of a dentist—I mean in anger.' 'In anger,' says he. 'Never beheld the face of a dentist—in anger'——" And here Peter burst into such a guffaw of laughter, and paid such small attention to the swaying tiller that only the merciful little cherub that sits up aloft could have said how a most ruthless gybe was avoided.

"But the song, Mr. McFadyen?" said Jess.

For a second Peter grew grave; he was considering. Then arose an unearthly howl—

'Cam' ye by Athol, lad wi' the philabeg,
Down by the Tummel, or banks o' the Garry?
Saw he the lads wi' their bonnets and white cockades,
Leaving their mountains to follow Prince Charlie?
Follow thee, follow thee, wha wadna follow thee—
Lang hast thou loved and trusted us fairly!
Charlie, Charlie, wha wadna follow thee—
King o' the Highland hearts, Bonnie Prince Charlie!'

The high-pitched 'wha' was almost beyond him; but Mr. McFadyen was not the man to give in; he attacked it gallantly; and the result was a screech that must have startled the distant jackdaws far up among the ivied ruins of Duntroone Castle.

"It's a little thing high for me," he remarked, with an air of apology; and he did not venture on a second verse; he was again observing the movements of the lad Malcolm—who had come aft to haul in the main-sheet, now that they were taking a more southerly course, with the wind on their beam.

"Well, Barbara," said the schoolmaster, "do you see the Lady Rock over yonder?"

The girl looked up in quick alarm.

"We're not going near there!" she exclaimed.

"No, no," said the councillor, gaily. "We'll just hold right on, and give ye a look at the Mull coast. It's a desolate place: a passing glimpse is all ye'll want."

However, as it turned out, they were to have more than a passing glimpse. For as time went on, those squalls from the east became more and more violent and vicious, and with each successive gust the too heavily canvassed boat would go heeling over, with a prodigious rattle of the loose spars on deck. The schoolmaster did not at all like the aspect of affairs; but he was loth to call in question the councillor's seamanship, lest he should frighten the young women; while the lad Malcolm had ceased to make any further suggestions—he watched those tearing and howling blasts, and then glanced uneasily towards the steersman to see what he would do. Mr. McFadyen of course was not to be daunted by any buffeting of wind and waves; outwardly at least he maintained a perfectly careless demeanour; he was even facetious at times; but it was too evident that his jocundity was forced. And meanwhile Barbara was beginning to show signs of abject terror.

"I say, McFadyen, this'll never do," Allan interposed at last. "We should have taken down a couple of reefs before coming out in this squally weather. Or couldn't you lower the peak, to take the strain off her? Anyhow we must try to work our way back."

"Ay, just that," responded the councillor, with assumed equanimity. "Oh, yes, I suppose we may as well go back now. We've had a fine spin—and now we'll go back."

Which was all very well; but to run before a series of squalls is one thing, and to fight back against them is another. And now these gusts continued to increase in fury, insomuch that the councillor, hardly concealing his dismay, would seek a precarious safety in jamming the boat's head into the wind, where she would stagger for a second or so with the sails cracking and flapping. Then just as often as not she would fill on the other side—with her weather sheets home; and here again would be further

commotion—the clinging folk in the cockpit being flung about like peas in a bladder. And all this time the cutter was steadily drifting—drifting on to a lee shore ; and that lee shore the east coast of Mull.

“Here, you,” called out McFadyen, in his anger and desperation, “what’s the price of this boat ?”

The lad Malcolm did not answer : he seemed bewildered.

“I’ve a great mind,” Peter called out again, savagely, “to run her over to Mull there, and bang her up on the beach !”

“Oh, yes, yes !” cried Barbara, piteously ; “anywhere that we can get ashore !”

“Would I not be doing right ?—would I not be doing right ?” he said, eagerly appealing to her for confirmation. “What do I care for the cost of a boat ? Human lives are of more value. I am responsib’le for your safety ; what do I care for this rotten old beast of a boat, that cannot sail any more than a cow ? You lad, there, get out an oar, and put her head away from the wind : I’m going to run her up on the nearest shore, that’s what I’m going to do, and ye may get the splinters back to Duntroone as best ye can.”

Almost immediately thereafter there seemed to fall around them an amazing calm and quiet ; the tumult appeared to cease ; they were gliding smoothly along with the hurrying waves, the main-sheet slacked out, the jib drawing steadily. Nor had Allan the heart to protest against this ignominious surrender, when he saw the agony of fright that Barbara was in ; her sole prayer was to get to land ; she did not care where or how. And the councillor, smarting under the humiliating consciousness of defeat, was as good as his word ; his teeth were set hard, his looks sullen ; he steered neither to the right nor to the left, for the navigation of Loch Speliv and that of Loch Don were equally unknown to him ; he was resolved upon running this unmanageable boat right up on the nearest shore—and he did it.

Not that it was accomplished without a good deal of confusion. As they neared the beach there was a thunder of breaking waves all around ; then of a sudden the bow of the cutter seemed to rise in the air ; she swung over to starboard, the boom splashing into the water ; spray began to break over the stern ; and the wrecked company pro-

ceeded to get forward and clamber down by the bowsprit shrouds and the bobstay. Of course they got pretty well wet in the tumbling surf; but at least they had now gained solid land—in a strange twilight, under the shadows of the hills. And the boat?

“Let the boat go to the devil!” said Peter, furiously, as he knocked the water out of his nether garments. “Let her go to the bottom! She’s not fit for anything else. A boat that cannot sail is better at the bottom of the sea than anywhere else.”

“Well,” said Allan, with a more philosophic air, “I suppose we’ll have to search for some farmhouse or some cottar’s hut, where Jessie and Barbara can be sheltered for the night; and I will make my way to Craigenure or some such place, and try to get a telegram sent to Mrs. Maclean.”

“But the lad—what about the young lad?” asked the ever considerate Jess.

The lad Malcolm, who had not made any remark during all this transaction, was now engaged in getting down the mainsail; and as the bow of the boat was firmly imbedded in seaweed and shingle—and as the jib remained sheeted home—it appeared quite possible that she would not swing broadside on to the beach. They called to him to come ashore; but he answered something about a kedge. At all events he was in no danger—when he chose he could clamber down from the bowsprit with no greater damage than wet knees.

But this was the most uncanny region in which they now found themselves: a solitary and voiceless region—no sign of any human habitation—no sign of any road—nothing but undulations of rocky moorland and heather leading up to precipitous and sterile crags. And no less remarkable was it when they turned from this clear, intense twilight to regard the glowing and warm-coloured world they had left behind; for the storm seemed already to have abated considerably, and away over by Cruachan and Cruach Lerags and Loch Feochan the skies were quite serene.

“Barbara,” said the schoolmaster, timidly—not wishing to provoke her to any petulance, “don’t you think you would make another trial? We may be wandering about this coast all through the night before coming to a house—

and Mrs. Maclean will be very anxious. The wind seems to be slackening down——”

“Will you keep away from the Lady Rock?” she said, with terrified eyes.

“Yes, yes,” he answered her. “I quite understand why you should be nervous—I quite understand that; but we can keep well away from the Lady Rock; we will be making across for Kerrara and the entrance to the bay. If the lad has put out a kedge, we might get the boat floated off, for the tide is on the flood; and anything would be better than wandering about the shore of Mull all night.”

And eventually he did persuade her to go down to the beach again, though she still looked on the disabled *Osprey* with evident apprehension. There could be no doubt that meanwhile the squalls had moderated in vehemence.

“Allan,” said Jess, demurely, “do you not think that Mr. McFadyen has had enough of the hard work? Why should you not sail the boat back?”

He looked at her; and whenever the eyes of those two met there was an instant intelligence between them.

“Oh, I’ll take my turn,” said he. “Yes, I’ll take my turn. And we’ll try her with a little less canvas on her.”

It was a tedious and difficult business getting the boat floated off again; but at last they had her under way, with her mainsail double-reefed; and as Allan was now in charge of the tiller, it fell to the gay McFadyen to beguile the time and cheer his companions with song. He sang of ‘Craigie Burn Wood;’ he sang ‘My Nannie’s awa;’ he sang ‘There grows a bonnie brier-bush,’ and ‘Flow gently, sweet Afton,’ and ‘Logie o’ Buchan, O Logie the laird,’ and many another well-established favourite. And all the while they were sailing through an enchanted world of fire and splendour; and when, after the long beat to windward, they entered Duntroone Bay, there was a golden moon in the south, and the lapping waters glanced and shivered in this new radiance.

“All’s well that ends well,” said Peter, as he courageously stepped ashore. “We’ve had a splendid sail, and a fine adventure. And after all, maybe it’s better for us to be back on the mainland rather than passing the night in some lonely wee public-house in the east of Mull.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ON BOARD A STEAMER.

THESE ought to have been halcyon days for the schoolmaster : vacation time—a newly-won and beautiful sweetheart—and the winding shores, the solitary bays, and the wild hills of the West Highlands for their long summer rambles. Then he had found an easy way of propitiating her to kindness and even to gratitude : when he brought her some little bit of millinery ornament she was as pleased as an infant with a new toy. Nor did he greatly deprecate the love of finery, and the love of display, that appeared to have gradually taken possession of her since she came to live in Duntroone. In many respects she was but a child ; and in her very childishness and ignorance there was for him a mysterious charm. Philosophy—poetry—history : these were all written about human life ; but here was that strangest of all strange things, a human life itself—wonderful, incomprehensible, and yet dowered with an increasing and enthralling fascination. Halcyon days indeed—‘the golden age—the golden age come back.’

No, he did not grudge her these pretty trifles—though he would rather have been saving up the cost of them for more important ends ; and he was glad to see her wearing them ; and proud of her appearance at all times. But now a much more serious matter intervened. When they came to discuss the question of choosing a house, he found that Barbara’s ideas and claims were of a kind to take his breath away.

“You will be giving up your lodgings,” said she, boldly, “and why should you not give up the rooms for your classes as well, and put everything in one, so that you could have a good house like Rose Bank ?”

“Rose Bank ?” said he, in astonishment. “Do you know what the rent of Rose Bank is likely to be, Barbara ?”

“They are telling me,” she responded, without flinching, “that your classes are sure to be getting bigger and bigger.”

"I wonder," said he, good-naturedly, "who ever heard of a poor schoolmaster being able to pay for a view!"

"Yes, it is a very fine view," said Barbara. "And I would like to see the steamers coming into the bay and going out; and every one coming in and going out would see the house."

"And what would they think? They would think I had married a fortune!"

"And why not then?" she retorted audaciously. "Let them think that, if they like! They are welcome to think that, if they like!"

He did not pursue the argument further, for she was apt to grow petulant when opposed; but on the earliest possible opportunity he went along to call on Mr. McFadyen, who he imagined would be sure to know all about rents, and rates and taxes, and the cost of furniture. Mr. McFadyen was in his office; and when he was told of Barbara's ambitious project, he openly laughed.

"Rose Bank?" said the merry councillor. "I'm thinking Allan, lad, ye'd soon be Rose Bankrupt! What would be the use of that big garden to you? See, now, I'll just take down my hat, and we'll go out for a half-hour's stroll here and there, and have a look round: maybe we may light on something a little more practicable than Rose Bank."

So the two left the office together, and set out on their house-hunting expedition; though it soon began to look as if this freak of generosity on the part of the councillor had not been wholly altruistic. He, also, seemed anxious to have advice and assurance.

"You're a clever fellow, Allan," he went on to say, "and learned and deep in metaphysics and the like o' that; and I've been wanting to put a question to you. I've been wanting to ask you whether it is his real self that a man reveals to himself in his dreams. Ye see, it's this way. I don't boast that I have more courage than other folk; I wouldna do that; but I hope I have my share—it's reasonable to hope I have my share. Well, then, if in a dream ye feel yourself a terrible, terrible coward, and if ye act as a coward, is that your real self—is that how ye would act if the circumstances were to happen to ye in real life? Ye see, it's this way. The night before last I had a long and

harassing dream ; I thought I was a soldier—and there was going to be a battle—and we were all drawn up in ranks—in a half kind of darkness, for the daylight was not yet declared. The enemy—savages—was coming near ; every moment we expected to hear the firing begin. I tell ye, the mortal fear that I was in I cannot describe to ye. There was a great big man in front of me, and I kept behind him as well as I could, and thought he might shelter me from the bullets. And then there was a corporal, or a captain, or somebody like that standing behind us ; and says I to him, in a clever, offhand sort of way ‘Ye need not think I’m frightened ; I’m just going along to sharpen my sword on the doorstep—it’s a wee thing blunt.’ And then I moved off to an empty house that was hard by ; and I passed in, and went away up to an attic ; and thinks I to myself ‘Now I’ll crouch down here in the dark ; and when it’s all over, I’ll go out again, and flourish my sword, and they’ll think I was through everything.’ And then, thinks I ‘But if the savages drive back our men, will the black devils come up the stair, and find me, and drag me out ?’ Dod, I was in a terrible way ; but I hid close all the same ; and the firing began—crack ! crack !—until I couldna help creeping up and looking out of the window ; and as sure as death, along with our men, facing the savages, there was a woman. And says I to myself ‘Have ye not as much courage as that woman ?’—and even then I would have gone down the stair, and gone out, but I declare to ye my knees were shaking so that I could not cross the floor. What happened after that I’m no sure ; but I ask ye—Was that me ? Was that my real self ? Is that what I would have felt, what I would have done, in a real battle ? It’s been distressing me, man, beyond measure ! Was that my real self ?”

“Oh, no, not necessarily !” Allan replied, and the councillor seemed instantly to experience considerable relief. “Just as often as not a man does things in dreams that he would never think of in real life—is a perfectly different person, in short. The chances are you are dreaming when your vitality is at its lowest point—the bravest man may imagine himself as timorous as a mouse—the wandering brain may suggest all kinds of horrors——”

"Because," said Mr. McFadyen, thoughtfully, "I would not like to think myself just such a coward as all that comes to. And yet—well, I have been trying to screw up my courage—and—and slackening away again. And I have been wondering—yes, I will confess this to you—I have been wondering what was the best way to ask a young woman if she will marry you?"

"I suppose every man has to find that out for himself," Allan answered.

"Ay, do ye say that?" the councillor rejoined, with a meditative air. "Do ye say that? Every man to find out for himself." And then he heaved a pensive sigh. "I'm thinking it's a terrible business," said he, absently.

On the first expedition they were unsuccessful—it was not a good time of year for house-hunting, when nearly every place, big or little, was let; but within the next day or two Allan heard of a small villa up in Battery Terrace that would become vacant in about a month's time, and he persuaded Barbara to go with him to look at it. Barbara was at first clearly disappointed by the size of this two-storeyed tenement; but its position—the position of the whole of the Terrace, indeed—was certainly conspicuous enough; it commanded a view over the whole of the bay. The lady in occupation—who was merely a summer tenant—appeared to recognise the situation of affairs; she displayed quite a friendly interest in this shy and beautiful-eyed young creature; and was most amiable in showing her the not over numerous apartments. The strange thing was that when they came out again, Barbara's first remark had no reference to this house they had been examining.

"When will you be taking Jessie and me to Tobermory?" she asked.

"Tobermory will not run away," he said, trying to get out of it in this fashion. "It will wait for us. There's no hurry."

"You said you would take us," she persisted.

"But if you wish for a sail, why not take the *Grenadier*, and let us go all the way round, and have a look at Staffa, and Iona, and the islands?"

"I do not wish to see islands," she said, almost sullenly; "I have had enough of islands. I wish to see the people

in Tobermory who are Mrs. Maclean's relatives, for they are my relatives too."

Well, he was most reluctant—though he could hardly have explained why—to go anywhere in the *Aros Castle*; yet after all this was but a trifling favour; whereas she had granted to him the greatest he could have demanded of her. Had she not acceded to his prayer that the wedding should take place in these present summer holidays—though many a girl would have insisted on a longer engagement?

"Very well, then," he said, "as soon as you like"—and without more ado she would have him at once go down with her to see Jess, and make plans for the trip.

And thus it was that on one of these mornings the school-master called for the two girls, and together they set forth, leaving the precincts of the town, and making for the South Pier, where the *Aros Castle* was lying. For this excursion Barbara had certainly decked herself out in her best and bravest; and again she had compelled him to wear a flower in the lapel of his light grey coat; indeed he and she might well be taken for bride and bridegroom away on their honeymoon tour, had it not been for the presence of Jess, whose costume, neat and trim as always, was nevertheless not of a showy kind. And yet, in spite of the general holiday appearance of this little party, Allan Henderson's face was grave. He could not but remember what had happened on a recent occasion.

"Barbara," said he, in something of an undertone, when they were approaching the steamer, "I do not know what quarrel you have with Ogilvie; but I hope at least you will not make any public display of it."

"I am not wishing to have anything whatever to do with Ogilvie," she said, with her head erect.

And here, sure enough, was the Purser, who regarded them with not a little surprise, especially when he saw that they were actually coming on board. All the same he advanced to meet them—with a kind of doubtful look on his face. It was Barbara who went first along the gangway. He raised his cap—waiting for her to decide whether there was to be any further greeting: in response to his salutation she accorded him the briefest and frigidest of

little bows, then she turned haughtily away, without a word. Jess came next; but with the ever-friendly Jess there was no trouble; he shook hands with her; and said "I hope you are very well, Miss Jessie"; and she passed blithely and smilingly on. As between the two men there was but the common and familiar nod, which meant nothing: it bespoke neither friendship nor enmity. Altogether, whatever embarrassment may have been felt, none was allowed to become manifest; besides, the Purser had his multifarious duties to attend to; there was every excuse for his not coming and paying further attention to these acquaintances of his.

Barbara would remain on this upper deck, so Allan went and fetched three camp-stools. She was quite gay and talkative; she was in holiday mood as well as in holiday attire; indeed, Jess had an uneasy feeling that she was making a parade of her high spirits and general satisfaction. However, there was a good deal of bustle going on around; for now the passengers had arrived from the train; the cables were being thrown off; and presently the *Aros Castle* was steaming across to the North Pier. Then, after a brief delay, the voyage was resumed; slowly, but with increasing speed, they crept away from the houses; they passed the lofty rock with its time-worn ruins; they stood away out into the swift-glancing blue waters of the Frith of Lorn. It was a perfect day; the colours on the hills were of a velvet softness, with here and there a stain of ethereal purple from some high and almost motionless cloud. The air was sweet and fresh, with a sharp and keen sea-flavour in it.

But as they drew towards Mull, Barbara's ostentatious enjoyment became moderated somewhat; and once or twice she looked apprehensively forward.

"Don't you be afraid, Barbara," the schoolmaster said to her, reassuringly; "we are not going anywhere near the Lady Rock. Of course I can well understand your being nervous: that must have been a bad hour or two you spent on the rocks there, in the darkness, though there was not so much cause for alarm, if you had only known. Now," he went on—talking for the sake of talk, to distract her attention from the solitary reef, round which the calm

summer seas were now peacefully lapping—"there might have been something to terrify you on the night that Mr. McFadyen ran us ashore on the coast of Mull. Did you ever hear of Ewen of the little head?"

"No," said she, looking up.

"Well, that is the district he haunts—from Duart to Lochbuie," he proceeded, "and if we had had to wander about during the night, you might have seen the wild horseman, leaping over chasms, and spurring up the sides of precipitous cliffs. That might indeed have terrified you——"

"But who was he?" she demanded: her eyes were beginning to 'glower,' as they always did when a phantom story was told her.

"Ewen of the little head?" he repeated. "Eobhann a' chinn bhig—he was the eldest son of one of the Maclaines of Lochbuie; and as he was rebellious and turbulent, his father was forced to call in his kinsman, Maclean of Duart, to subdue him. Duart got together his men and marched down towards Lochbuie; and there was to be a great battle; and the night before the battle, Ewen of the little head went to a witch to ask her if he was to win on the morrow. But I should have told you that Ewen was married to a woman of great meanness and parsimony. Very well. When he had asked the witch she says to him 'To-morrow morning, at breakfast, if your wife gives you butter without your asking for it, then you will win the battle.' Next morning at breakfast Ewen waited and waited, and his wife offered him nothing. 'Why are you drum-drumming with your feet on the ground?' says she—for he was in a terrible rage. 'It is better for a man to be slain,' says he, 'than live indoors with a bad wife.' And with that he rushed out, and called his followers to the battle; and almost at the very first onset, he had his head slashed from his shoulders with one stroke of a broadsword. And then it was that his horse tore away, and galloped and galloped through the glens and over the hills—for days and days he was seen—the headless horseman in full armour, galloping across impossible places, at a fearful speed. Ay, and he is seen now. He is seen whenever any harm is going to happen to one of the Maclaines of Lochbuie. And

that would indeed have been something to terrify you, if you had encountered Eobhann a' chinn bhig, the night we were ashore on Mull."

"It is to frighten children that they are telling such stories," she said—though she herself seemed considerably impressed.

"No, no, Barbara," Jess said, with the shrewd and pleasant grey eyes smiling. "That is not why the story is told. The story is told by husbands to warn their wives not to be too miserly with them."

And with this desultory talk, varied by an occasional glance at their fellow-passengers, they called in at Craignure, and left again and went onwards and across to Loch Aline—*Loch Aluinn*, the beautiful loch—and resumed their course up the Sound of Mull, the day all radiant around them. At the same time Jess could not but be conscious that she was the third person here. These two must of necessity have many things to speak of—their wedding—the house in Battery Terrace—their future plans—that they would prefer to talk over by themselves; and so she by-and-bye got up and began to stroll about a little, looking at this and that, until at length, in the course of her apparently aimless peregrinations, she went down the steps leading to the main-deck, and there she took her place on a seat by the gunwale, just aft of the companion descending to the saloon. Now they were free to talk as they chose; she could not see them, nor they her; probably by this time they had already forgotten her existence.

But there was some one else who had observed her retreat to this sheltered spot. In a little while the Purser came up to her.

"Miss Jessie," said he, "I am very glad to have the chance of a word with you. I think your cousin Barbara has got off her head."

"What do you mean, Mr. Ogilvie?" said Jess, rather bridleing up.

"Well, she came down to the quay the other day," he went on bluntly enough, "and she was as insulting as she could be—aloud—so that there was no mistake but that I should hear. And what I say is, she'd better keep a quiet tongue. I do not want to make mischief; but I will not

suffer that kind of thing from any young madam, I do not care who she is. And that is what I say : your cousin had better keep a quiet tongue. I have a piece of paper in my pocket at this moment ; it was lucky I did not tear it up and throw it away. But there was a bit of a tussle between Henderson and me ; and I did not know what might come of it ; and I thought I might as well keep this scrap of writing." He brought out a leather pocket-book. "I am not vindictive," he proceeded ; "but I will not have insolence from anybody. And I wonder what Henderson would say if he saw this ?"

He extracted from the pocket-book a folded piece of paper, and opened it, and handed it to her. She recognised Barbara's handwriting readily enough—*'Will you meet me to-night at nine o'clock, at the small gate under the Castle Hill? I have something of importance to say to you.—Barbara.'*

"Do you see what that means ?" he said. "I can hear her talking and boasting about a house in Battery Terrace, whenever I chance to pass by ; but she does not know that I have that little message in my pocket. And of course I did not go ; I did not even answer her ; I'm for a quiet life ; I refuse to be dragged into trouble to please her or anybody else."

For a moment or two Jess was silent, as she stared blankly at the words before her, and her fingers were slightly trembling ; she began to understand certain matters that had of late been strange to her.

"But you told me—you did not wish to make mischief ?" she said, slowly.

"No," he replied, with a certain hesitation. "I do not particularly want to make mischief. At the same time——"

Quick as thought she tore the paper twice across and pitched the fragments over the side : they floated away on the seething foam in the wake of the vessel. And almost as white as that foam were her firm-set lips.

He looked mortified only for a second.

"I suppose you think you've done your cousin a very good turn ?" he said, with an appearance of equanimity. "Perhaps so. But if the writing has been destroyed, the

facts remain. And I tell you the young madam had better take care."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A PUBLIC SACRIFICE.

IT was on one of these afternoons, as Allan Henderson and Barbara were returning homewards by the shores of the solitary and beautiful Loch Sleochan, that they beheld a marvellous apparition steal slowly into the still landscape. Far away, beyond the glassy waters of the lake, far away beyond the swampy morass where the curlews were calling, down the lonely moorland road came a long, undulatory, straggling assemblage, dark in hue as contrasted with the surrounding country, yet showing tags and dots of colour here and there.

"What is that?" asked Barbara, with her eyes staring.

"Terrible as an army with banners," said the schoolmaster. "It is a revolution, Barbara. No, it is a resurrection—of all the hosts slain in the time of Eobhan a' chinn bhig——"

He paused. Surely there was some faint and measured throb borne to them on the listening air?—and was there not a glint of sunlit brass at the head of the long and serpentine procession? The martial music became more audible.

"Whoever they are, friends or foes, we must meet them, Barbara," said the schoolmaster.

But that was precisely what did not happen. For at this point the road wound round one or two promontories jutting out into the mirror-like lake, so that they lost sight of that distant concourse of folk; and when in process of time they again came in view of the head of the loch, there was not a human being anywhere visible. It looked as if the earth had suddenly opened and swallowed them up.

"Did I not tell you they were ghosts?" said Allan.

"They have gone into the grounds of Inveruran House," retorted Barbara. "I can hear the band still playing."

Well, when these two arrived at the lodge-gate, Allan made bold to ask the woman in charge what was meant by this portentous invasion of so secluded a neighbourhood; and she answered him that the young laird had invited the temperance societies of Duntroone to come out and listen to an address and witness a ceremony; and that a number of the townspeople had accompanied them. From the way she hung back she evidently expected that Allan and his companion would also pass in; and Barbara was curious; spectacular displays of any kind are rare in that country-side; so the two new-comers accepted the mute invitation, and entered. As it chanced, they were well repaid.

For when they had reached the end of the winding avenue, and emerged into the open, a remarkable scene presented itself. On the steps in front of the open hall door stood four persons: a tall, elderly lady dressed in deep mourning, two younger ladies in more cheerful attire, and an oldish-looking young man of about eight-and-twenty, with clean-shaven face and rather tired eyes. At the foot of the wide steps, on the carriage drive, were ranged rows of large vats and barrels. Then all around stood the crowd, in a sort of loose semi-circle, most of the men wearing badges and insignia, conspicuous amongst which were the red and white and blue and white sashes of the Rechabites. When the schoolmaster and Barbara drew near the motley gathering, about the first person they recognised was Long Lauchie, the shoemaker; and by him they remained; doubtless he could tell them as well as anyone what was going forward.

At first, indeed, there was nothing but an ordinary temperance lecture, which the young man with the grey, worn face was delivering, if not with eloquence, at least with a convincing simplicity and earnestness. But if these statements he was making were familiar, they were none the less welcomed by his audience with an extraordinary enthusiasm; cheer after cheer arose at the end of each telling sentence; and even the lads and boys who formed the fringe of the throng contributed their reckless hurrahs. All save Long Lauchie seemed to share in the general excitement. The unhappy Lauchlan was silent and depressed; his eyes were lustreless; a melancholy 'of Cerberus

and blackest Midnight born,' appeared to have possession of his soul. His gay sash was hardly in keeping with this air of profound despondency.

But it was now that young Murray of Inveruran proceeded to explain the chief reason why he had asked these good folk to assemble. He would not, he said, utter a single word against those who had gone before him ; other times had other manners ; and there was no doubt that our forefathers had been in the habit of drinking more than was good for them. In these present days the national conscience had become awakened ; serious attention had been called to the widespread misery and ruin resulting from the use of alcohol ; and man's duty to his fellow man had become part of the accepted moral law. Long ago, he went on, he had resolved that when in the course of nature he came to succeed to the Inveruran estate, one of his first acts would be to see that every butt and bin of wine, every cask of ale and spirits, found in the cellar should be destroyed ; and if circumstances had detained him in foreign parts during the last few years, and delayed the execution of this project, the time had at length arrived. It was not, he said, a trifling sacrifice. Large sums could have been obtained for the various wines that, for convenience sake, had now been decanted and emptied into the vats before them. There were ports, sherries, madeiras of almost incredible age ; there were Burgundies, clarets, Rhine wines of inestimable quality ; there were brandies and whiskies that had been handed down from generation to generation, and carefully tended and replenished. But no pecuniary inducement could tempt him to the dissemination of poison. It must be destroyed !

[Here there was an indescribable commotion throughout the crowd ; the yelling and cheering became tumultuous ; the small boys threw their caps in the air, with more wild hurrahs. Long Lauchie sighed heavily.]

It had been suggested to him, the young laird proceeded, that he might have sent these wines and spirits to the great hospitals in the south. But medical men did not seem to agree as to the efficacy of alcohol in cases of illness ; and even if it could be proved that here and there some slight advantage might accrue, the counterbalancing risk of sowing

the seeds of fatal habits was of far greater import. No ; he would have no half-measures ; he would carry his principles into practice ; there was nothing for it but the utter extermination, so far as lay in one's power, of those pernicious fluids that were wrecking the body and soul of our fellow-creatures.

“ John ! ”

There was a little old man standing by, a little old man with short side-whiskers, who held a hammer in his hand.

“ Perhaps,” said the young laird, with a dry smile coming over his prematurely desiccated face, “ perhaps it may interest you, gentlemen, to know that the first cask to be opened contains between twenty and thirty dozen of Madeira, that made several long voyages in my great-grandfather's time. It has come to the end of its travels at last.”

He signed with his finger to the little old man, who in a nervous and tremulous fashion went along to the furthest vat. There, after some tugging and hammering, the bung was extracted, and at once there gushed forth a stream of clear amber fluid. A hoarse roar of rejoicing arose from the crowd. “ Hurrah !—hurrah ! ” shouted the small boys. And Lauchlan MacIntyre, when he observed the turbid rivulet come along the channel for draining the carriage drive—so close under their feet that Barbara had to step on to the lawn to save her skirts—Lauchlan regarded it with an air of still deeper dejection, and sighed more heavily than before.

“ I admire that young man,” said the schoolmaster. “ It may be idiocy—but there's earnestness at the back of it. And he's a weakly-looking creature, too.”

Barrel after barrel followed—red streams, golden streams, white streams, commingling and rushing away down the sloping drive ; while the din and clamour of the exultant Reelabites filled the quiet evening air.

“ Poor old Sandy Livingstone ! ” said the schoolmaster, absently. “ There's now one water the less for him to poach. This stuff will have killed every sea-trout in the Uran burn.”

“ It is a sin and a shame ! ” said Barbara, in sharper tones. “ There are many poor people who might have had the benefit, in the cold of the winter.”

“What, what?—you must not talk like that, Barbara!” her companion remonstrated. “You have been greatly privileged. You have witnessed a sacred rite. You have beheld a libation poured out in honour of one of the new gods; and who knows but that the new god may be well worthy of worship? Anyhow, the worship itself is the valuable thing: think with what a serene conscience that young man will fall asleep to-night.”

“Ay, the conscience,” murmured Lauchlan, from the depths of his woe. “You may well say that—you may well say that. It’s the conscience that has to be obeyed—though the flesh cries out in its wakeness.”

And at length the work of destruction was complete; there remained nothing but the empty tuns and the purple and brown stains on the gravel. Then the hero of the hour thanked the assemblage for having responded to his invitation; they gave him three cheers, and one cheer more; the band took up position; the ranks were reformed; and to the stirring strains of ‘Neil Gow’s Farewell to Whisky’ the whole concourse, small boys and all, set out again for Duntroone. There was no very strict order kept on this line of march; stragglers from the crowd joined in the procession so as to chat with their friends; and thus it was that Lauchie MacIntyre could still have with him the two young people whose society, in his present dolorous state, had proved something of a solace to him.

“I’m afraid,” said Allan—in an interval of peace allowed them by the band—“I’m afraid you’re not looking so well, Lauchlan.”

“No, I am not well at all,” replied Lauchlan, with another heavy sigh. “I have been eating nothing, or next to nothing, for some time back. I’m not fit to be here the day—but it was a great occasion—for giving testimony——”

The band broke in upon them with ‘Johnny Cope’—a fine marching tune. When quiet had been restored Lauchlan turned to the other and younger of his companions.

“I was hearing of the wedding, Miss Barbara,” he said. “And there’s a little present I have waiting for you—will you come into the house, and take it home with you?”

"Indeed I am obliged to you, Mr. MacIntyre," responded Barbara, with glad assent. Allan looked a little disconcerted : it was scarcely for one in Long Lauchie's circumstances to be buying wedding-presents. But the schoolmaster did not at the moment put in an objection ; he was unwilling to rob Barbara of any little pleasure ; and perhaps after all the gift might not be of much value.

So when they had got back to Duntroone, the three of them made for the shoemaker's humble dwelling, and ascended to the room on the first floor. It was a cheerless-looking place ; and perhaps it was the doleful aspect of it, or perhaps it was the fatigue of the march, that seemed to overcome Lauchlan ; with a hopeless groan he sank down upon a wooden chair. And then again he raised his head, and began to look round the apartment, warily and fearfully.

"Sometimes," he said, in a sombre fashion, "sometimes I am seeing things that are not there."

Then he appeared to remember why he had invited these guests to come indoors ; he got up from the chair, and went away, slowly and dejectedly, to a cupboard in the passage.

"Barbara," said the schoolmaster, in a quick undertone, "Lauchlan MacIntyre is far from well. Could you not offer to make him some tea ?"

"I could not offer to make tea in another person's house," she replied, not too civilly.

Almost at the same moment Lauchlan returned, holding in both hands (for they were shaking a little) his wedding-gift. It was an old-fashioned four-tubed Scandinavian liqueur-bottle, that originally had been something rather fine ; but it had been debased by the addition of a flaunting electro-plated handle and stopper ; and was now apparently serving as a whisky-decanter.

"It belonged to my wife," said he, "and she might come back to tek it aweh."

"Oh, thank you indeed !" said Barbara, receiving the gift with manifest gratification.

"Barbara—you cannot !" interposed the schoolmaster, with an angry and impatient frown. "It is Mrs. MacIntyre's !"

"Ay, that is the reason—that is just the reason," said Lauchlan, as he sank into the chair again. "She might come back. I am not wishing for it to be here. And it is of no use to me now," he went on mournfully. "It is of no use any more—never any more. It is a sign of evil things that have been thrown aside; I am not wishing to see it again."

"Barbara," the schoolmaster once more protested, "put that decanter back in the cupboard. It belongs to Mrs. MacIntyre."

"But if Mr. MacIntyre is wishing it out of the house," Barbara rejoined—and she showed no disposition to part with her present—"it is for him to decide."

"Ay, ay, tek it awch," said or moaned the shoemaker, and he disconsolately shook his head. "There will be no bottles of any kind in this house, not any more—never any more."

Well, the schoolmaster would not interfere further; but as he and Barbara walked away home to Campbell Street, there were black looks on his face; and barely a word was spoken between them. Barbara did not seem to be much concerned; she carried the electro-plated decanter wrapped up in a half-sheet of the *Duntroone Times*; she was doubtless looking forward to a further contemplation of her treasure. And indeed Allan, still in one of his dark moods, was disposed to leave her to her own devices; when they reached the house, he bade her good-bye curtly, without offering to accompany her upstairs; and when she had gone, he forthwith betook himself to the shop over the way, where he found Jess behind the counter.

At sight of Jess the 'dour' look on his face softened considerably; and it was in a kind of appealing fashion that he told her all about the shoemaker and his disastrous plight.

"O the poor man!" she exclaimed. "If he is as ill as that, and not having anything to eat, he will get worse and worse. This is what I will do now, Allan; I will take along a few things, and see if he cannot be tempted—a Finnan-haddie and some strong tea would do him good, I am sure—and then he could go to his bed. And you must come with me, to compel him," she added, laughing at him

as usual. "It will be quite a relief to you to have someone to hector and overmaster ; it must be very dull for you in the holidays, when you have no one to browbeat and threaten."

"Will you do that, Jessie ?" he said—not heeding her jibes.

Her answer was prompt and decisive. She went into the parlour to apprise her mother ; she whipped on a hat and jacket ; she got a basket and put a number of things into it ; and presently these two were on their way to the shoemaker's, though Jess had to stop here and there to make a few purchases. Then, when they were in the house, she directed him to go into the room where the hapless Lauchie was still sitting, while she took possession of the kitchen. Lauchlan was not a cheerful companion ; and Allan, waiting there, could hear quite plainly what she was about : he could hear the sticks being put into the grate ; he could hear them beginning to crackle in the flames ; he could hear her getting forth plates and knives and forks from the cupboard. And not only that, but he could make out that Jess as she went hither and thither, was contentedly and blithely singing to herself the song of the 'Twa Bonnie Maidens'—

*'There are twa bonnie maidens, and three bonnie maid-ns,
Cam' over the Minch and cam' over the main:
Wi' the wind for their way, and the corrie for their hame,
And they are dearly welcome to Skye again.'*

And well he knew the meaning of the enigmatic refrain—

*'Come along, come along, wi' your boatie and your song,
My ain bonnie maidens, my twa bonnie maidens,
For the night it is dark, and the red-coat is gone,
And ye are dearly welcome to Skye again.'*

"She's a good-hearted lass, that," said Allan, almost to himself.

"Did ye speak ?" asked Lauchlan—trying to rouse himself out of this stupor of abject misery.

"I say this," continued the schoolmaster, "that Jessie Maclean has taken a great deal of trouble in bringing you these things ; and you're not going to offend her by refusing them."

Refuse them ? He could not !—they would have awakened

the pangs of hunger in the interior of a Caryatid. For here was Jess with a snow-white cloth for the small table ; and here were plates and knives and forks all bright and clean ; and here was a golden-shining Finnan haddock, smoking hot and well peppered ; and here was crisp brown toast, with pats of fresh butter ; and here were young lettuces plentifully besprinkled with vinegar. Then the tea, not over-sweetened, was strong enough to have galvanised a mummy ; so that gradually, when Lauchlan had eaten and drank a little, the apprehensions of imminent death—alternating perhaps with some vague longing for the same—appeared to fade away somewhat from his features.

“It is a kind woman you are,” he said to her, in Gaelic, “and it is I that am thankful to you for coming here this evening.”

“Then you must go to bed soon, and have a sound night’s rest,” Jessie answered him.

“Ay, ay, just that,” he said, reverting to English—“and maybe—maybe I’ll not be seeing them things that are not there.”

They left him much comforted in body and mind ; and as Allan accompanied Jess back to the shop, he was endeavouring to express his gratitude to her for her charity towards the unhappy shoemaker. But Jess did not seem to think much of what she had done ; when she bade him good-bye, she returned to the little parlour and to her placid knitting ; and as the ‘Twa Bonnie Maidens’ had got into her head, she occasionally beguiled herself with a phrase or a stanza.

*‘There’s a wind on the tree, and a ship on the sea,
My ain bonnie maidens, my twa bonnie maidens ;
Your cradle I’ll rock on the lea of the rock,
And ye’ll aye be welcome to Skye again.’*

“You’re crooning there like a cushie doo,” said her mother, looking up from her newspaper. “Has any one asked ye to marry him ?”

“They’re not likely to do that, mother,” she answered, with great contentment. “And I’m well enough without.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BEST MAN AND BRIDEGROOM.

BUT Jess was mistaken. There was at least one person whose sole and consuming anxiety at this moment was to ask her to become his wife, if only he could summon up his courage and also find an opportune occasion. The latter point was the councillor's chief difficulty. As for courage, he had resolved to discard the shadowy evidence of dreams ; if at times he had found his physical nerve not quite what it might be, he had on the other hand a sufficiency of moral will ; he made no doubt that when the great crisis came he would be able to acquit himself. But how was he to have private speech with Jess when she was either sitting in the parlour with her mother, or walking out with Barbara, or consulting with Allan about the window-hangings of his new house ? And then every day the schoolmaster's wedding was drawing nearer ; and he, Peter, was to be best man—with this supreme problem of his life left unsolved. The councillor grew desperate. He determined that he would take the very first chance that presented itself, no matter how, when, or where, to free himself from this terrible perplexity.

And yet it was not an auspicious chance, as it turned out. One morning he was walking along Campbell Street, and in passing the tobacconist's shop he glanced in and noticed that Jessie was behind the counter, and that she was standing there alone. A sort of vertigo of bravery rushed to McFadyen's head : he would dare his fate then and there. He stood stock-still for only a second ; perhaps it was to collect himself for the plunge ; then he entered the shop. Jess received him with the kindest greeting.

"Have you heard," he said, after a brief bewildered pause, "that I am to be Allan's best man ?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, "Barbara was telling me that."

"Ay——" And here there was another pause. He

seemed trying to utter something. "Ay," he managed to say at length, "but I would rather be going to the wedding in another capacity."

"Well, well," said Jess, with a touch of wonder in her benignant grey eyes, "would you like to be the bridegroom yourself? But I am not astonished; all the young men are daft about Barbara—every one of them; they cannot keep their eyes off her when she is in church——"

"No, no, I did not mean that at all," the councillor broke in, hurriedly. "Do ye not understand, Miss Jessie—it is not as anybody's best man I would like to go to the wedding—there's something else possible——"

"I want two ounces of cut cavendish and a clay pipe," said a thin small voice, and a little red-headed lassie came timidly forward and put a silver coin on the counter.

Mr. McFadyen glared at this youthful emissary as though he could have strangled her; but there was nothing for it but the smothering of his wrath; he had perforce to wait in silence until she was served and had gone away.

"Do ye not understand, Miss Jessie?" he resumed. "If there were two weddings on the same day, would not that be better? I would rather go in the capacity of bridegroom than as best man—that's what I'm driving at. If Allan and me had our weddings on the same day, that would be something like. And how can you speak of Barbara? How can ye imagine I was ever thinking of Barbara? I'll not deny that she's an attractive kind of lass—ay, and well set up—the young Queen of Sheba I was calling her to Allan the other day—but, bless me, there's finer qualities than a slim waist and a silk gown——"

At this moment the door was darkened, and no less a person than the Provost—a big, burly man, with a frank, broad face and a loud, honest voice—looked in.

"Good morning, Miss Jessie!" said he.

"Good morning, Provost."

"Ay, ye're there, friend McFadyen—I got a glimpse of you; and I was wanting to see you," the Provost continued, briskly. "Have ye drawn out your notice about the North Pier?—I would like to have a look at it before ye submit it to the Council. But we're all with you; there'll be no opposition; we must just pay the £50 to the Board of

Trade and get an examination ; and I'll be surprised if they find that the conditions of the grant of the foreshore have been complied with. Everyone admits that the state of the North Pier is a scandal and a disgrace to the town ; there'll be no opposition ; but I'd just like to have a look at the terms of the motion—if ye do not mind, that is——”

Mr. McFadyen was choking with rage and vexation ; but what could he do ? He could not throw the Provost into the street ; for the Provost was a man of large build. He could not bring his all-important conversation with Jess to its proper climax in presence of a stranger. And if he remained boxed-up in this corner, to be talked-to about the North Pier, his anger, that he with the greatest difficulty kept under control, would inevitably break forth and cause an amazing scene.

“Come away, then—come away,” he said at last, with concealed ferocity. “The paper is in my desk ; come along to the office, and I'll show it to ye there. Good-bye, Miss Jessie—I hope I will see you soon.” And therewith the luckless councillor departed—no doubt inwardly cursing the North Pier and the foreshore and everybody connected with both.

But fortune was more friendly towards him on the evening of this same day ; for as he was passing along the front he perceived that the schoolmaster, Jess, and Barbara had all of them just got into a rowing-boat, bent on some excursion or another. He quickened his pace, got down upon the beach, and hailed them before they had gone any distance.

“Will ye ship another passenger ? ” he cried.

“If ye'll take an oar,” Allan called in return—and he proceeded to back the stern in and on to the shingle.

“That will I !” said the councillor, blithely, and presently he had got into the boat and taken up his post at the bow. “I would not enter myself at a regatta,” he proceeded ; “I'm not for showing off ; but in an ordinary kind of way I can take an oar with anybody. Dod, some o' the young fellows at the Gymnasium can do most astounding tricks !—but what's the use o' them ? It's steady work that pays in the end ; and I could go on like this just the whole day. Did I tell ye they had made me treasurer ?

Ay, that's my proud title : Treasurer of the Gymnastic Section of the Young Men's Guild. It's all very well for lads at their time of life to twirl themselves round wooden bars ; but when it comes to accounts, they have to call in age and experience. A little longer stroke, Allan—slow and steady—that's it—that's it now—man, I could go on like this for four-and-twenty hours."

Now oddly enough all of these remarks were addressed exclusively to the school-master. The moment of his entering the boat the quick eyes of the councillor had observed that Jess Maclean looked most unusually embarrassed. It could not be that he was unwelcome ? Or had she divined what he had been about to say to her when the burly Provost put in his unfortunate appearance ? The latter was the more probable ; and so much the better, Mr. McFadyen said to himself ; she must have had time to consider ; she would not be startled when next he had an opportunity of urging his suit.

But when and how was any such opportunity to be secured ? His companions seemed to have neither aim nor destination ; there was not even a hand-line in the boat ; they appeared to be quite content with sailing out into this world of strange and mystic splendour. And they had reason to be content. For if the sun had gone down behind the deep rose-purple hills, there was still plenty of light and radiance ; the after-glow was all around them ; the bay and the outer seas as well formed but one vast lake of molten gold ; while there was a warmth of hue along the hanging woods and the terraced gardens and houses they were leaving behind. Dark and clear were the lofty ruins of the Castle ; dark and clear were the outjutting rocks in shadow ; soft and clear was the twilight of the Maiden Island ; but out in the open—far out on that golden lake—the one or two small boats that lay at the fishing banks were of the intensest black. These were magical evenings for lovers ; no wonder the councillor longed to be of the company.

And after all Mr. McFadyen did find his chance ; for when they had pulled away round by Camas Ban, Allan proposed that they should get ashore and go for a stroll along the level sands. Jess was the only one who hung

back ; she said she would rather remain in the boat ; then they remonstrated ; and finally, not to seem singular, she landed with them. And almost immediately the four became two and two ; it could hardly be helped ; in view of the imminent wedding, every one knew that the school-master and Barbara must have many things to talk over ; and it was but common civility to leave them to themselves.

"Jessie," said the councillor, when some little space intervened between the two couples, "did ye not understand what I was going to say to ye when the Provost came in this morning ?"

"Maybe I guessed what it was—and maybe I was sorry to be guessing," answered Jess, in a low voice.

"Ah, but you must not say that !" the councillor went on, anxiously and earnestly. "I'm not an ill-hearted man ; and I'm not a spendthrift ; ye would find a comfortable home ; and I've waited a long time for ye, Jessie. I know there's younger men than me ; and it's but natural ye should think of someone younger ; but maybe they would not put such a value on you as I do. To me you're just the one in ten thousand ; the best I ever knew, and the best-dispositioned ; when you try to say a spiteful thing, there's aye a laugh in it, and no harm done——"

"Oh, Mr. McFadyen," said Jessie, in great distress, "you must not talk like that ; and you must not speak of this any more ; we can be friends just as we have been for so long. And you must not think I am not sensible of your uncommon kindness, not only to us but to Allan—your helping him about the classes—and seeing about the new house for him——"

"It was for your sake, Jessie," he interposed.

"But," she said, quickly, "you will not let your relations with Allan be altered now, whatever else happens ?"

"Whether it is to be yes or no from you, Jessie," he answered her. "I'm not going back from anything I undertook to do for Allan, you may be sure of that. I'll stand by him, if he should want a friend——"

Her hand stole timidly towards his, for a second, in mute token of thanks.

"But, Jessie," he exclaimed, though still in an under-

tone, "I cannot see why it shouldn't be yes. I have been coming about your house for a long while, and on the best of terms with you and your mother, and I'm sure I wasna noticing there was any one you had fixed your fancies on——,"

"Oh, there's no one—there's no one!" said Jess—and she was crying a little. "You need not think of that. It's just that—well, I cannot explain—but, Mr. McFadyen, you have been so kind to us, to all of us, that I will ask something more of your kindness, and it is to put away that idea from your head, once and for all, and let us be the same friends that we have been for so long a time."

The councillor hesitated for a second. Then he said—

"I will take your answer, Jessie, for the present. And I will not bother you. But I am a patient man—and I have seen strange things happen, through waiting. Only, I will not bother you, until you yourself give some sign."

And therewith for a few moments they walked on in silence until they rejoined their companions, who were on the point of turning at the end of the sands; and together the four of them strolled back to the boat: and presently they had set off for home again, through an enchanted twilight—for now the golden moon had sailed into the lilac heavens, and golden was the pathway of flame that lay on the smooth water all the way over to the black shores of Kerrara. Clear and lambent as the night was, none of them noticed that Jess had been crying.

And thus it happened that, not as bridegroom but as best man, Mr. McFadyen beheld the wedding-day approach; and indefatigable and important was he in the discharge of his duties; and handsome indeed were the presents he bestowed on the young couple. Then the little widow would not have her niece leave the house quite penniless—she must have her modest dowry; and Jess also contributed from her slender store—at the same time persuading Barbara that plum-coloured velveteen was hardly suitable as a travelling-dress; and the shoemaker showed his interest and concern by calling once or twice to beg and implore them not to permit the use of alcohol on the day of the ceremony. Amidst all this bustle of preparation a most remarkable piece of luck (as she considered it) fell in

Jess Maclean's way. She was not much of a reader of newspapers ; and it was by the merest accident that her eye happened to light on an advertisement of the new number of a certain great quarterly, giving the list of contents ; and there she saw, to her inexpressible joy, that the first article was entitled "The Volkslieder of Germany." Within a couple of minutes she was out of the shop and on her way to the railway-station.

"Can you get me that," she said, showing the advertisement to the young man at the book-stall, "Can ye get me that and make sure that I'm to have it by the day after to-morrow ?"

"I'll try," said he. "I will write at once."

"No, no," said she. "That will not do. There must be no mistake about it. You must telegraph ; and I will pay you for the telegram." She took out her purse. "Surely, if you telegraph now to Glasgow, the magazine should be here by to-morrow night, or the next morning at the latest."

"Oh, yes ; there's little doubt," the young man said.

"And you will send it along to me the moment it comes ?"

He promised to do so ; and Jess, her face radiant with satisfaction, hurried away back again. But she did not reveal to a living soul what she had discovered and what she had done.

The wedding ceremony, as is usual in Scotland, was to take place in the bride's home ; and no doubt it would have been quite modest and unpretentious but that Mr. McFadyen, by virtue of his office, overrode all their scruples and protests, and insisted on having things managed well and properly. He meant to show Jess that he could be as good as his word ; and naturally he was a free-handed kind of a man ; when, for example, there arose the question of getting help at the breakfast—the girl Christina having to attend over the way at the shop—he promptly solved the difficulty by going along to the Argyll Arms and engaging at his own cost two of Mrs. McAskill's waiters. Then he greatly pleased Barbara by consenting to arrange for an open carriage to take them from the house to the railway-station, whereas Allan had been pleading for a closed cab. And

when the schoolmaster was grumbling and growling against the proposal to have speechmaking at the breakfast, Peter paid but little attention ; speechmaking he would have ; he was already prining himself by the study of a little six-penny guide to that art.

At length the fateful day arrived ; and the young Queen of Sheba was arrayed in all her splendour ; and the minister was merciful as to the length of his address. Then, when the simple rites were over, and a decent interval had elapsed, Mrs. McAskill's waiters appeared on the scene ; the table was hauled into the room again : and presently there was furnished forth a quite elegant little feast—the presentation decanters, and the crystal, and the tiny bouquets of flowers making a most bright and cheerful show on the white cloth. The minister presided ; Mr. McFadyen acted as 'croupier' ; and when the small company had taken their seats, it was seen that the cunning councillor had so arranged matters that Jess found herself placed next to himself—Jess, whose friendly grey eyes were at their kindest towards every one present. All went merry as a marriage bell, indeed ; the minister told humorous stories hoary with age ; the councillor was so extremely facetious that the nimblest wit could hardly follow him ; healths and toasts were proposed and answered ; and Mrs. Maclean, though she was a little overawed by the presence of the two waiters, was nevertheless delighted with the careful way in which they handed round her trembling jellies. In the midst of this prevailing and joyous tumult a tall and melancholy figure presented itself at the door.

"Aw, it's a sad sight—a sad sight !" exclaimed a mournful voice. "It's a sorrowful thing to see two young lives beginning like this——"

The councillor looked up quickly. He was just about to rise to ask them to drink the health of Mrs. Maclean ; and he had the opening sentences of his speech ready and pat on the tip of his tongue ; so that the interruption entirely disconcerted him.

"Well, what do you want ?" he demanded, with his eyes glaring.

"It's my duty to protest," said Long Lauchie, regarding dismally the decanters and the glasses on the table ; "I was

thinking it would be like this—ay, and it's a peetiful thing to see the two young people with ruin and destruction staring them in the face——”

“Oh, 'go to the mischief!” cried the councillor—his eyes now fairly glittering with rage. “Here, you waiters, pitch that man down the stair!—fling him down the stair!——”

But Allan interposed. He rose and went to the door, and got hold of Lauchlan by the arm, and led him out.

“My good friend,” he said, “your zeal does you every credit; but it lacks discretion. There's no drunkenness going on there, nor anything approaching to it. As for Barbara and myself, we are next door to teetotallers.”

“Ay, that's just it—that's just it,” said the shoemaker, with a deep sigh. “Ye do not understand your danger; ye think you're safe because of such treacherous guides as temperance and moderation; ye do not see that they are leading you to the brink of the pit. It's an ahfu' thing to think of, how near you are to perdition and disgrace——”

“Tuts, tuts, man!” said the schoolmaster, with angry brows. “Listen to me now. If you'll come in and sit down and have a bite and sup with us—water if you like—you'll be heartily welcome; but we wish for none o' this hawering——”

“Ay, ay, just that,” responded Lauchlan, with a lamentable shake of the head. “But I'll not trouble ye. I've done my duty. Maybe you'll see your grievous mistake before the destruction comes upon ye. I'm hoping that—yes, yes, I'm hoping that—for I wish ye well—I wish ye well——” And therewith he departed—as miserable a human being as any in Duntroone; but at least he had done what he could; if the young couple were rushing on their doom, it was not for want of warning.

This brief interruption was soon forgotten among the general festivities, which were, indeed, prolonged until it was about time for the young folk to think of their train. Moreover it had been arranged that while the rest of the company should say good-bye here in the house, or at furthest on the pavement below, Mr. McFadyen and Jess, as the two special friends, were to drive in a cab to the

railway station, to bid farewell there. When Jess and her companion arrived on the platform, she was carrying a small parcel wrapped up in paper.

There was no time to lose; the guard was coming along, examining the tickets. Barbara got into the compartment, and began assorting her travelling paraphernalia.

"Allan," said Jess, shyly, "I could not get you any wedding-present that I thought you would like——"

"What's that, Jessie?" he made answer, in accents of reproach. "When your kindness of these past weeks has been one continual wedding-present!"

"But I have brought you a little thing here," she proceeded, "that maybe will please you—and surprise you—if you have been too busy lately to notice much in the newspapers——"

She undid the packet that she carried, and handed to him the new number of the quarterly that had been telegraphed for from Glasgow. He took it from her—and the next moment he gave a sudden little start of astonishment.

"God bless me," he exclaimed, in a boyish rapture of delight, "they've given me the first place!"

And he would turn over the pages—or rather, the sheaves of pages, for the edges of the review were uncut—his fingers holding the sheets open, his entranced eyes following this or that sentence, this or that paragraph, as if it were all a marvel and wonder to him. He forgot about the urgent guard; he forgot about the thanks due to Jessie for her ingenious thoughtfulness; he even forgot about his impatient, and perhaps petulant, bride. And then amongst them they got him bundled into the carriage, his treasure clasped tightly under his arm; the door was slammed to; there was a shriek of a whistle, and the train began to move; finally came a fluttering of handkerchiefs so long as a certain window remained visible. Then Jess turned away.

"I'm going back to the house with you, Jessie," said the councillor. "You and your mother will be a wee thing dull after so much excitement; and I just mean to take the privilege of an old friend to intrude on you."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FOREBODINGS.

HERE surely was an idyllic scene : a silvery lake stretching far away to the south—the ruins of an ancient castle on a solitary island—a fisherman standing up in a drifting boat and leisurely sending his line out and on to the quiet ripples—his sole companion (for the boy at the oars need not be counted) a beautiful young creature seated in the stern, whose pensive dark-blue eyes had wandered off from the book lying idly in her lap. An all-pervading silence was in the soft summer air ; if a heron made its heavy flight from one promontory to the next, it was on slow-moving and noiseless wings.

“Come, now,” said the schoolmaster to Barbara, who had spoken hardly a word during the last two hours. “You’ll do yourself a mischief if you go on in that wild way, Barbara. Your high spirits will be the death of you. When you keep up such a rattle of laughing and joking, it is just bewildering to the brain.” Then of a sudden he changed his tone. “But really now—tell me the truth, Barbara—do you really find it dull here ?”

“There is nothing to see,” she said.

“Gracious heavens !” he exclaimed. “Nothing to see ! All around you lies one of the most beautiful lochs in Scotland ; over there is the Pass of Brander ; yonder is Kilchurn Castle ; and above you are the slopes and peaks of Ben Cruachan. Plenty of folk would tell you that Loch Awe is about as near to fairyland as anything you could find on the face of the earth——”

“I do not understand the need of living in a farmhouse,” she said, rather sulkily, “when we have a better house of our own that we could live in.”

He was so astonished that he forgot to recover his line ; the flies began to sink in the water.

“Do you mean that ?” said he. “Would you rather go back to Duntroone now ?”

"Yes," said she, curtly.

"Well," he proceeded, after a moment, "people may wonder at our cutting short our honeymoon almost before it has begun ; but, indeed, it is none of their business. And there's a great deal to be done to the house yet ; and I have some literary work I should like to begin hammering at." He was slowly reeling in his line now. "Maybe I have not been quite considerate, Barbara. Of course you could not be expected to interest yourself in trout fishing——"

"What is the use of catching fish that no one thinks of eating?" she answered him.

He was taking off the casting-line to wind it round his cap, for the better drying of the flies.

"Yes, there's always common sense in what you say, Barbara—always common sense in what you say. And I should have remembered that you might tire of a quiet place like this. You like looking at people. Well, we'll pack up and be off the first thing to-morrow morning. And you'll get on with the decking out of the house ; and I'll take to my books."

And thus it was that, to Jessie's great surprise, when she was least expected, Barbara walked into the shop.

"Have you quarrelled already?" said Jess, laughing.

"Oh, no ; but I was wearied of sitting in a boat and doing nothing," answered Barbara. "And there are a number of things wanted for the house yet—I have a list here—will you come with me, Jessie, and help me to choose them?"

"If you are going to make your purchases in such fine clothes as that, Barbara," said Jess, regarding her cousin's showy attire, "they'll be charging you the highest prices everywhere."

"There is little advantage," retorted Barbara, with a slight toss of her head, "in having nice things, and putting them away in a drawer, instead of wearing them."

Jess was never very anxious to have the last word ; her sole reply was to go and fetch her hat and jacket ; and together the two cousins set forth on their expedition.

Now all through the furnishing of the house in Battery Terrace Jess Maclean had been the chosen adviser of the young couple ; and lucky it was for them that she could

spare the time ; for Barbara's ideas were of a large and liberal order ; while Allan—always shy in money matters—was simply unable to deny his betrothed anything. Generally speaking, when Barbara's childish love of finery and display was like to have led them into serious extravagance, some compromise was effected more in accordance with the schoolmaster's limited means. But on this particular morning, Barbara, now armed with the authority of a wife, seemed to know no restraint ; whilst Jess, finding her remonstrances unheeded, became frightened at her own complicity.

"Barbara," she said, on coming out of one of the shops, "are you sure your husband would like your opening accounts in that way ?"

"It is impossible to carry money in your pocket to pay for all these things," responded Barbara at once.

"I know there is nothing he abhors so much as debt," Jess ventured to say.

"Everyone thinks that the classes will be growing bigger and bigger," Barbara made answer.

"But they are not meeting just now ; and there is no income from them——"

"And that is why the people can put the things down in a book ; and then, when the classes meet again, they will be paid."

"I hope at least you will tell Allan," Jess once more ventured to say.

"Whether I tell him or whether I do not tell him is of little matter—he has the use of the things I am buying as much as any one else." And with that Jessie's protests were for the moment dismissed.

By this time it was nearing a quarter to one ; and Barbara said she would like to go into the railway-station, to call at the book-stall.

"The book-stall ?" repeated Jess, with some surprise.

"I was reading," her cousin explained, "that if you wish to make a parlour or drawing-room look home-like, you should put two or three illustrated papers about, and I may as well get them when I am here."

She got the papers, and had them rolled up ; but when she came out of the station again, she said—

"Now we will go along to the South Pier and cross the bay in the *Aros Castle*."

"It will be quite as quick to walk back," Jess pointed out ; "and you are not half through your list yet."

"But I would rather cross over in the steamer," she said, impatiently ; and of course a young bride, petted and spoilt by every one, expects to have her own way : Jess smiled assent, said 'Very well,' and accompanied her—not knowing what all this might mean.

She was soon to learn. For no sooner had Barbara got on to the upper-deck of the *Aros Castle* than she began to give herself airs of ostentation ; she affected great gaiety of spirits ; and wherever the Purser, in the pursuance of his duties, happened to pass by, she would manage somehow or other to be talking of the house in Battery Terrace.

"Can you see the curtains in the windows, Jessie ?" she would say, as if she were oblivious of everything around her, and all intent upon straining her eyes towards the distant villa. "Maybe red is easier seen than anything else. Or maybe it is because Battery Terrace is above the smoke of the town that you can make out things or guess at them. I am going to have lace curtains up as well, when I have time. But the red looks very well, when you are passing along the Terrace."

Ogilvie paid no heed to her. He had greeted Jess Maclean when she came on board ; Barbara he had ignored altogether—he did not even raise his cap. Whether or not he surmised that he was being 'talked at,' he looked sullen and annoyed.

But she forced him to take notice of her. For when they had crossed the bay and were approaching the North Pier, she went bodily up to him.

"How much for my cousin and me ?" she said ; and she produced her purse, and took out from it a sovereign. In doing so she could hardly help displaying not only her wedding-ring but also the keeper-ring with its rosette of garnets.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," he answered her—but his face had flushed red with vexation. For this was an open insult. She knew as well as he that there was no recognised charge for a mere passage from pier to pier ; again

and again on former occasions he had asked her to accept the few minutes' sail as a compliment.

"I wish to pay," she said, coldly, and she offered him the sovereign.

Anger burned in his eyes.

"I have not enough change," he said, shortly, and he turned on his heel and left her. When the gangway was shoved on board, Barbara was the first person to go on shore, and she certainly had a proud and erect carriage. Jess followed—with some vague, half-alarmed notion that in the circumstances silence was best.

It was about eight or ten days thereafter that Allan Henderson went down to call on Mr. McFadyen. The servant-maid who opened the door told him that her master was in the yard behind; so he passed through the house, and found himself in a large open space, the further end of which was occupied by massive stacks of coal, while at the nearer end appeared a smart little greenhouse. But it was the group in front of him that caused Allan's eyes to open wide; for here was the chubby counsellor standing in front of a large horse—a great, big, raw-boned creature, with prominent knees and shaggy pasterns—while hanging by was a long loutish lad who had the appearance of an ostler's apprentice.

"It's a present, what d'ye think!" said McFadyen to his visitor, as he contemplated with a curious expression of face this uncouth quadruped and its rusty saddle and bridle. "Dod, I think I could have done without it; bnt, ye see, Mrs. Dugald up at the Rinns she declares that the beast is no manner o' use to them now, since her husband died; and she cannot bear to sell it, for it's an old favourite. Well, if I have to pay for its keep, I must make some use of the creature; and at present I am getting the stable-lad here to bring it along for an odd half-hour, nows and again, so that I can practise mounting and dismounting. Man, it's grand exercise!—just famous!—and I tell ye I'll soon be a dab at it. See this now——"

He boldly advanced to the animal, and, without bothering about the reins, he twisted a tuft of the mane round the fingers and thumb of his left hand; then he managed, with a little difficulty—for he was a short man and rather corpu-

lent—to get his left foot in the stirrup ; with a clutch at the cantle and a spring from his right foot he rose in the air ; there was a moment of dreadful suspense ; and then with a brief but frantic effort he succeeded in throwing his leg over, while the protuberant part of his person, coming in contact with the pommel, prevented his pitching forward and down the other side. He was quite proud of the performance.

“Dod, I tell ye it’s a grand exercise !” said he, sitting serene and happy in the saddle. “It’s fifty times better than twirling round a wooden bar. It’s just splendid for the liver !”

And then he clambered down. And then he sprang and clambered up again ; and all the while the patient brute only turned its head occasionally to see what was going on --never once did its ears fall wickedly back, never once did its hind heels lash out. Probably in its day it had beheld many strange things, the meaning of which had never been very clear to its poor old brain.

But at this point a stranger appeared on the scene, coming out from the house and bringing with him a tripod, a box, and a black cloth. At sight of him, the councillor, even in his pride of place, seemed to be a little uncomfortable—he even blushed somewhat.

“Ye’ll not be thinking,” he said to Allan, “that I want a photograph to show about and pretend I am a great horseman. No, no ; but what I say is that a man cannot have any idea of what he looks like on horseback—it’s impossible for him to tell what appearance he makes—until he has a photograph taken. Then he sees. Maybe his figure does not suit the back of a horse ; and if that is so, it’s better he should be aware of it ; and take to shoe-leather again. So ye’ll not mind, Allan, my lad, waiting for a minute or two longer ; I’ll be with you directly ; it’s a quiet beast—there’ll be no trouble.”

There was no trouble. The sober-minded animal stood as if it were of bronze and set up in a public square ; Mr. McFadyen, for all his professions of modesty, maintained a lofty and commanding attitude ; the photographer got through with his work quickly ; and then, as the ostler-lad came forward to the horse’s head, the councillor dismounted, and ushered his visitor into the house.

“And how are ye at home, Allan?” he asked, cheerfully, as he threw open the parlour door.

“That’s what I have come to speak to you about,” the schoolmaster made reply, “if you can give me a few moments.”

“Sit down and light your pipe, then; I hope ye’ve the best of news,” Peter observed, as he drew forward a chair and put the tobacco-canister on the table.

But the schoolmaster did not light his pipe. He seemed unusually grave and concerned; and his eyes were bent on the floor. Presently he said—

“Maybe you could tell me this, McFadyen. If you’ve been paying the premiums on a life-insurance policy for a number of years, what proportion of the paid-up money would the company give you back if you offered to surrender the policy? Have you any idea? This is how the thing stands: ten years ago I took out a policy—no great amount either—but I thought, if anything happened to me, it might make up to the old folk a little of the cost of my schooling and classes; and I’ve sent in the premiums regularly. And now I’ve been wondering how much they would return me if I handed over the policy——”

“Man alive, what are ye talking about!” exclaimed the councillor, with open indignation. “You, in your position, a young man just married, to be thinking of giving up your life-policy—ay, when ye should rather be thinking of doubling it! I’m just astonished to hear ye! And why come to me? I’ll tell ye the one that has the first right to be consulted—I’ll tell ye the one that has the right to forbid ye—and that is your young wife. Ask her, and she’ll soon stop ye from any such preposterous madness.”

Allan did not raise his eyes from the floor. He merely said, in a resigned sort of fashion—

“It’s on Barbara’s account that I am asking. Of course the policy belongs to her now; and she would rather have the ready money—at least I gather as much. You see,” he continued, and he looked up with some air of apology, “she has a fine courage of temperament. She is not nervously anxious about the future. And she’s young—she likes to make much of the present hour——”

McFadyen appeared to be wholly dumbfounded,

"It's madness—it's sheer madness!" he reiterated, with unmistakable conviction. "To sacrifice such a safeguard for the trifling proportion they would return ye! And what does she want the money for? Bless me, what does she want the money for? But no—it's not my business to inquire."

The schoolmaster rose from his chair and began to pace slowly up and down the room, his hands behind his back, his brow contracted.

"There are strange things in human nature," he said, in a half absent kind of way, "and one has to make allowances. And perhaps it's not so difficult to understand how a girl brought up as she was at Knoekalanish, and coming to a place like Duntroone, should have her brain turned a little bit—for the time being—for the time being, I mean. Duntroone must have seemed a rich and splendid place to her; and perhaps it was but natural she should wish to dress with the best of them, and have as fine a house as others. She is by nature fond of pretty things, showy things; and it is hard to refuse her, when you see her as proud of her finery as a child might be. I'm not complaining. No. As for myself, I could willingly live on oat-cake and water—but—but I could not ask her to do that—I could as soon think of asking her to sell those bits of ornaments and trifles she's so fond of——"

"What does it all mean, Allan?" cried the older man, in something like consternation. "What has happened? Are ye not seeing your way quite clear before ye?"

"The way clear before me?" said Allan, suddenly, stopping short in his nervous paces to and fro. "God help us all, I see nothing but ruin staring us in the face!" And then he checked his vehemence. "No, no; I should not say that. Maybe it is only temporary; her head is turned a little just for the time being; maybe her own good sense will show her that we cannot go on as we are living at present. But it is a terrible thing to have to remonstrate——"

"And it is a dangerous thing to come between husband and wife," said Mr. McFadyen, "even with the best-intentioned of advice. But yet—yet I'm not such a coward as to keep silent altogether; and I tell ye, Allan, that to

give up your life-policy would be most unjustifiable—would be downright wicked. It's on her account I speak. It matters nothing to you—only that a man does not like to think that his wife will be left penniless in the case of anything happening to him. And that's what I maintain—I maintain it—that you've no right to sacrifice such a safeguard, I don't care for what purpose——”

“In any case,” said Allan, as he took up his hat again, “you seemed to think the commutation would be but a small affair?”

“That's my impression—but small or large is not to the point,” McFadyen insisted, as he accompanied his visitor to the door; and he was still reiterating his emphatic counsel when Allan, with many thanks, bade him good-bye.

But events were now about to happen that speedily put the question of the insurance policy out of the schoolmaster's mind.

CHAPTER XL.

IN PERIL.

It was next day about noon that Jess, hearing some slight noise in the front-shop, rose from her seat in the parlour, and stepped forward. She found Niall Gorach awaiting her.

“And what do you want now, you rascal?” she said, in her usual light-hearted fashion. “You are the fine one indeed—promising to give me a sight of the white stag in the Creannoch Forest——” She paused for a second: there was something uncanny about the appearance of the half-witted youth: his eyes seemed starting out of his head. “What is it, then? Have you seen a warlock?”

“It's the other one,” he blurted out at last. “The black-haired girl—that was living here——”

“Do you mean my cousin Barbara?” said Jess.

“Ay, just that—and—and they've tekken her away to the polus-offus.”

“Oh, what are you hawering about!” said Jess, good-

humouredly : she was stooping to get some books out of a drawer, and not paying much heed to him.

"As sure as death—as sure as death!" Niall eagerly protested, now he had found his tongue. "They were tekken her down the street—a polisman on one side, and—and—McLennan's shopman on the other—and they were going to the polis-office——"

Jess regarded him more seriously.

"If you're telling me a story, I'll give it to you!" said she. "But maybe some one has been stealing from Barbara's new house; and I'd better go along and see what is the matter. Are you quite certain now they were going to the police-office?"

"As sure as death—I wass seeing them myself!" the lad insisted; and therewith Jess stepped into the back-parlour, told her mother that she was going out for a few minutes, and, slipping on some slight articles of attire, she left the shop.

Quickly, but with no great alarm in her heart, she went along the front of the harbour, crossed over by the railway garden-plots, and approached the police-station. There was no sign of Barbara anywhere about. She hesitated for a minute or two, looking up and down; but this small thoroughfare, lying somewhat back from the rest of the houses, was wholly deserted; and so at length, overmastering a curious kind of reluctance, she forced herself to ascend the few steps, and entered. She found herself in a large, gaunt, bare apartment, the walls placarded with notices and regulations, a wide counter shutting out the public, a desk behind, and seated at the desk the sergeant in charge. He was a little, grizzled-haired man, with a sharp, observant, bird-like eye.

"Has my cousin Barbara been here?" said Jess. "That's Mrs. Henderson—the schoolmaster's wife——"

"Ay; and she's here now," was the laconic answer.

"Here? Where!"

"In the cells."

"What is't ye mean?" cried Jess—but rather faintly; and her face had grown suddenly pale.

The officer glanced mechanically towards the folio volume lying open on the desk beside him.

"She's charged wi' theft," said he.

"But—but it's a mistake!" Jess exclaimed, hurriedly. "And—and you'll let her come away with me now; and if there has been a mistake, my mother and me will pay whatever is wanted. She's a young lass; she's not used to the ways of a town; and we will have it all put right before her husband can hear anything about it. Where is she? Can I see her? You will let her come away with me, and my mother will make sure that no one is wronged, even if there has been a mistake——"

The sergeant, as it chanced, was no ill-conditioned jack-in-office; besides, he knew the Macleans quite well by sight. And this young woman who now addressed him had pleading grey eyes and a soft and conciliatory voice.

"You should get an agent," said he; "that's the first thing to be done. And in the meantime you can see your cousin now, if you wish——"

"And she will come away with me," interposed Jess, quickly, "before any one is told—before her husband can hear anything about it?"

There was a shake of the head.

"No, no; not that way. The charge has been made against her. There'll have to be the declaration diet as soon as possible; and both the Sheriff-substitute and the Procurator Fiscal are in the town; there's no need for delay. But you should get an agent, Miss Maclean; that's the first thing——"

"And Barbara—can I see her now?"

He turned to a constable that was standing by, and said a word or two to him.

"If you will follow this officer, he will take you to the cells," he said to Jess—and thereupon he raised a portion of the counter to let her pass through.

It was hard on Jess Maclean that she had had no opportunity of preparing herself for this interview. All the circumstances were a bewilderment to her; she only knew vaguely that something terrible had occurred that must at any hazard be concealed from the proud and severe schoolmaster; Barbara, poor lass, had got into this incomprehensible trouble, but surely there was still a chance of spiriting her away before the neighbours' tongues began

to wag? And yet when Jess, following the constable, stepped out into the exercise-yard of the prison, a cold chill struck at her heart. It was a dismal, deserted-looking place, this cindered court open to the sky and enclosed by lofty and sombre walls; and again, when she regarded the long, low, grey building in front of her, she perceived a series of small, isolated, high windows barred across with iron bars. She guessed that Barbara was behind one of these—the poor, fluttering wild-bird from the distant islands that had come wandering hither to this sorry doom. Nevertheless Jess was in no over-piteous and tremulous mood. By this time she had strung herself together. It was rescue she was bent on—ere Allan could hear of what had happened.

The officer who led the way rang a bell; and the door was opened by a big, burly, goodnatured-looking man in uniform, who proved to be the warder. Almost before he was told he seemed to divine the mission on which Jess had come; and at once he called his wife, handing her his bunch of keys. Presently Jess found herself being conducted by this woman along a narrow, dimly-lit, stone-paved passage, on one side of which were several doors, each marked with a number, and each furnished with a small square aperture covered with a flap, as well as with a still smaller eye-hole commanding the interior of the cell. There was not a sound—not a sob nor a groan—to tell which of those silent and unknown cavities contained a broken human life.

At length the warder's wife stopped; she inserted a key into a large iron lock and undid the heavy bolt; and the next moment Jess beheld in front of her a small, bare, oblong chamber, at the further end of which, in the dusky twilight, and seated on a transverse bench, was a crouching and downcast figure, that made no sign whatever even at this abrupt interruption.

"Barbara!" she cried, and she flew forward, and went down on her knees, and took her cousin's hand in hers. "What is it! What has brought you here! What is the mistake about! Tell me—and we will get it cleared up at once. And maybe you would rather I did not send for Allan—just as you like, Barbara——"

A shiver seemed to run through the girl's frame.

"No, no—not him—not him!" And then she looked up strangely and fearfully. "Jess, what will they do to me?—what will they do to me? Will Ogilvie get to hear of it?"

"I wonder you should think of Ogilvie," said Jess, almost indignantly, "in trouble like this! What concern has he with you, or with us? But they're saying I should employ an agent for ye—and maybe he will get everything put right before any one knows of it. And you have not told me yet what the mistake was all about, Barbara: how did you come here?"

Barbara was trembling from head to foot now; and her head was bent down.

"It was in McLennan's shop," she said, in a low and heavily-breathing voice. "It was a blouse—a silk tartan blouse—and they were saying I took it—but—but it fell from the counter. And then there was the policeman: they brought him in. What will they do, Jess?—what will they do to me? And will Ogilvie hear of it?"

"Oh, put Ogilvie out of your mind!" said Jess, as sharply as she could find it in her heart to speak to this hapless creature. "Have ye not Allan to think of first of all? And then my mother—what will she be saying, that has held up her head high enough all her life long? But never mind, Barbara: I'm going now to get the agent: maybe I'll no be long before I'm back. You see, they'll not let me take you away home just at once; but the agent—surely the agent will manage it—and nobody be any the wiser. So I'll not tell Allan; and I'll not tell your auntie, either; my word, my word, if she was to hear of this, I'm thinking Mr. McLennan would be getting his kail through the reek, as they say in the south! So keep up your heart, Barbara—keep up your heart, lass!—and never you think about Ogilvie—there's others that's more to be considered than him."

And then and swiftly Jess left this dreadful nightmare of a place, and sped away through the town, until she came to the offices of Grant and Lawrie, solicitors. She was fortunate enough to find the senior partner, who was a friend of Mrs. Maclean's, in his rooms; and forthwith she told her story.

"And will you get her out at once, Mr. Grant?" said she, gazing anxiously and earnestly at this tall, thin, sandy-haired man, whose quiet, attentive, steel-blue eyes seemed to respond so coldly to her urgent prayer. "The sergeant at the police-office he was saying something about the Sheriff and the Fiscal; but surely there's no need of that when the mistake can be explained! The tartan blouse fell from the counter; and maybe they thought she had taken it; but she will tell you what really happened; and—and if there's anything to pay, my mother and me we will gladly pay it." In spite of herself some moisture gathered about her lashes; and she covertly put up her hand to remove the glistening drops. "It's only £3 10s., Mr. Grant!" she went on. "I know that, for Barbara was telling me about the blouse a week or two ago; and my mother would rather pay the money, ay, many times over, than have any disgrace come upon Allan——"

"There's no disgrace at all if she can be proved innocent," the lawyer interposed.

"But there is—there is!" said Jess, passionately. "There will be all the people talking—and think what that would be to one that's as proud and sensitive as Allan Henderson. And the young lads at the classes, they will be speaking among themselves. Mr. Grant, can you not get her away? Never mind what money it will be!——"

The long, hard-visaged lawyer slowly rose from his chair.

"Just rest ye where ye are, Miss Jessie," said he, "for a few minutes; and I'll step along and see the Fiscal."

So Jess was left alone in this musty-smelling chamber, with its rows of japanned-tin boxes. The solitary window looked to the back; and there were the steep slopes behind Duntroone, with their terraced gardens and an occasional walled-in villa. She saw a summer-house, too; and a young mother seated in front of it, knitting; while a small boy of five or six, to whom she called from time to time, trundled a toy-barrow up and down the gravel. There were some people who seemed to have never a care.

By-and-bye she heard a sound of footsteps on the staircase without, and her heart began to beat rapidly; but when the door was opened she perceived that Mr. Grant had returned as he went, unaccompanied,

"Where is she?" Jess demanded, breathlessly.

"In about an hour's time," responded the lawyer, as he leisurely resumed his seat, "or maybe less, she will be taken before the Sheriff, for declaration. I will be there to look after her——"

"Could not I be with her, too, Mr. Grant?" Jess put in. "She's used to me! She'll be terrified going before all these people, by herself. Will you let me go with you, Mr. Grant?"

"Impossible," was the answer. "The proceedings are private—and quite simple. There will be nobody present in the Sheriff's room but the Sheriff himself, his clerk, the Procurator Fiscal, your cousin, myself, and a constable or two. And I will strongly advise her to say nothing at all. She will merely have to sign the declaration."

"And she's not coming back home now?" cried Jess. "When, then—when?"

"I can apply for liberation on bail, if you wish——" Jess eagerly assented. "—and if the Fiscal does not oppose, then we could find caution for her to appear at any diet she may be cited for——"

"Caution money? Yes, yes, surely that!—there's my mother—and Mr. McFadyen, that's ever been a good friend to us—and Mr. Stewart, of the Steam Packet Company——"

"But I am afraid, Miss Jessie," the lawyer continued, bending grave eyes on her, "that your desire to keep all this hidden from your cousin's husband will not answer. I certainly think he ought to be informed——"

"But if Barbara is let out on bail," said Jess, in this last extremity, "could we not manage to get everything settled without it coming to his ears at all? Why should he be told? He can do no good. You will be there to look after her, Mr. Grant——"

There was little further time for argument; the solicitor had to return to attend to the interests of his client. Nor would Jess remain longer in this solitary room; she said she would rather go and wander about until she could meet him in front of the Court-house, to learn the result of his application for bail. And indeed, when she had parted from him outside the office, she neither knew nor cared in

which direction her steps were turned. Blankly she gazed at the traffic going on in the harbour; at the steamers coming and going; at the shifting glooms and splendours that filled the world. For this was one of those rare days on this windy and changeable coast—a day of slow-moving sea-fog; and while for a time the silent white mists would come mysteriously creeping up the Sound of Kerrara—obliterating headland after headland, hiding away the boats in Ardentrive Bay, and gradually smurring and blotting out craft lying still nearer at hand, so that amid the prevailing gloom stretching all around one waited to feel the first tingling touch of the rain—none the less would the interfusing sunlight begin stealthily and imperceptibly to declare itself again, the floating vapours would roll themselves into softly-rounded clouds, until here and there a space of calm blue sea would reveal itself, with the white sails of a schooner or cutter reflected on the perfect azure plain. It was all like a dream, like a vision, to Jess: the real thing she saw before her eyes was a narrow cell, a dusky figure downcast and shuddering, and a small barred window that seemed to shut out hope as well as the light of heaven.

Then, long before the appointed time, her unconscious steps led her along to the Court-house; and there she waited. The first person who came down the wide stone stairs was Mr. Grant himself.

“But where is she?” demanded Jess, in accents of surprise and reproach.

“She has been taken back to the cells,” he answered her, with just the least touch of embarrassment. “The fact is, there are some peculiar features in the case; and the Procurator Fiscal—well, he rather opposed the application for bail; and the Sheriff declined. But it’s of little consequence, Miss Jessie; we must just do our best for your cousin, and help her to clear herself of the charge; and in the meantime you cannot do better than let her husband know——”

“But—but what is to happen next?” said Jess, in blank dismay.

“There’ll be the trial,” said the lawyer, not quite meeting her eyes. “First of all there will be the Pleading

Diet six days hence ; and then the trial by jury nine days after that——”

It seemed to Jess as if Barbara were being inexorably withdrawn from them ; as if she had been grasped in iron clutches ; as if barriers, far more terrible than those across the small window, were being interposed between her and her friends. And now there remained nothing but for Jess to go away back to the shop, to let her mother understand what this was that had befallen them.

“Mother,” she said, at the door of the parlour—and she appeared to speak in almost a light-headed way—“you and I—we have had many years together—with very little trouble. There’s been many with far more trouble and suffering—and sorry enough we have been if we could not help. And now—now that we may have to take our share—like the others in the world—well, we must not repine too much—and—and we must face whatever is before us——”

The little widow had risen from her seat : it was not like the gay-hearted Jess to be talking in this half-hysterical fashion.

“What is it, Jess ?”

Then Jess told her tale. But the widow, when she had heard the news, so far from being frightened, was moved only to violent anger and indignation.

“It’s a conspiracy—I tell ye, it’s a conspiracy amongst them, Jess,” she exclaimed, “to drag down our name into shame and disgrace. What harm have we done to any o’ them ? And yet I can see it—first this one and then that—it’s McLennan now ; but how long ago is’t since it was Boyd the jeweller—Boyd that came out of his shop and accused one of my girls of stealing a brooch from him ?—I declare to ye it’s a conspiracy to bring disgrace on us, Jess——”

Nay, it was not the widow, it was Jess herself, who now betrayed a sudden alarm.

“Mother, mother, what are you saying ?” she cried. “I thought that was all forgotten—forgotten by every one but me. And forgotten it must be by you now ; there must be no word of it : do ye understand ? Do ye understand, mother ?” she went on, earnestly. “There must be not a

word of that to any living soul. For there may be suspicion on every side now; and hunting up of bygone things; you would not injure Barbara, would you, mother, by speaking indiscreetly? We must be watchful and careful—and—and help Mr. Grant every way we can; and maybe he'll be able to get all of us—Allan, and Barbara, and ourselves out of this sore trouble."

"Ay, and ye say that Allan has not been told yet?" her mother proceeded. "And who is going to tell him, then?"

Jess said nothing; she turned her eyes towards the floor, and some slight colour suffused her cheek.

"There's just none but yourself, Jess, and that's the truth," her mother said. "Ye're such a wise kind of creature; and Allan will pay heed to you when he would not listen to any one of the rest of us. Will ye go up to Battery Terrace, Jess?"

"If you like, mother," she answered, after a moment's hesitation. And presently she had set forth again—her eyes still downcast—for she had to consider, with some trembling apprehension, how she was to carry this message to the schoolmaster.

CHAPTER XLI.

HUSBAND, WIFE, AND FRIEND.

WHEN Jess went up to Battery Terrace, and asked if the schoolmaster were at home, she was at once shown into the the front room; but nevertheless she paused at the half-opened door; for she perceived that Allan, up by the window, was pacing to and fro, apparently in great agitation, while he looked from time to time at a letter he held in his hand. Then, when he became aware of her presence, he said hurriedly, and in something of a broken voice—

"Is't you, Jessie? Ay, ay, you're always at hand to help when there is trouble. And you'll look after Barbara—I cannot imagine where she has got to—but you'll find her, and tell her I had to leave for Glasgow by the four-thirty

train. Read this letter, Jess—read it—did you ever hear anything so pitiable?”

He handed her the “double sheet of paper, and abruptly turned away towards the window. It was strange to find the usually stern and proud schoolmaster so bereft of self-control. Then her eyes followed the feeble, sprawling caligraphy that rambled across the blue pages.

“Glasgow, 48, Hamerton Street,

“Tuesday morning.

“DEAR OLD CHAP,

“This is my last message to you. I’m done. And yet it should be a message of congratulation ; moriturnus tesaluto ; I heard from Tom Dallas all about your wedding ; and just about the same time I read your quarterly article, and I called out to you ‘Bravo !’ in a fit of coughing, and drank your health in a table-spoonful of doctor’s stuff. But did not I always say it, when we were at college together, that you were one of the strong ones, one of the lucky ones ; and now that ‘you’ve taen the high road, and I’ve taen the low road,’ all I can send you as a legacy is my share of the grand things we used to talk about and purpose doing.

Last night, in the middle of the night, in the darkness—with just a wee bit blob of red light at the tip of the gas-burner—I made these verses ; and I thought them fine ; for through the gloom I could see the dear old island, and the running seas all round it, and the white skies. Fine enough I thought them ; ‘to mak a body greet,’ almost, when you’re lying alone in the dark and thinking of what you’ll never see again on this earth. Here they are :

In Colonsay my heart remains!—

Colonsay, ah, Colonsay!

My weary heart that went from me,

And fled afar across the sea,

Where the wild gulls are flying free

By Colonsay, ah, Colonsay!

And here am I with many pains:

Colonsay, ah, Colonsay!

The heavy footfalls in the street

Scarce heavier than my pulses beat:

The lowering heavens the house-tops meet:

Colonsay, ah, Colonsay!

The people traffic in their gains:
 Colonsay, ah, Colonsay!
 Dear God, this is my only cry,
 Show me but once before I die,
 The long white sands—the silver sky—
 Colonsay!—loved Colonsay!

But now when I look at them—as you will be looking at them—in the cold and unsparing daylight—I can see well enough what they are: not an atom of *spunk* in them—no more than there is left in myself—nothing but a sick, tired, aimless cry. And yet what I've been thinking is: If my old chum Allan Henderson would only say to himself—' *Mir träumt* : *ich bin der liebe Gott*.' Do you understand, Allan? Will you take me to Colonsay?—there's the question, with its bold face of brass. The doctor talks about Torquay—he might as well talk about Terra del Fuego: I've neither the means, nor the strength, nor the desire. My old grandmother, the last of the stock, she still pretends to have faith in drugs and nursing; but I'm far past all that. No, there's only one thing left me to wish for in this world; and if you, my old friend, would come through to Glasgow, and if you would take me down to Greenock, and carry me on board the *Dunara Castle*, and maybe you would go as far as Colonsay with me, and help me out there, and lay me down on the sands, so that for a few minutes I could see the clear water again, and the white clouds, and smell the peat-reek coming along from the cottages—ay, just for five minutes—then I would lie down and shut my eyes, and trouble no one any more. You need not think I am any weight to carry now; and you were always the best of us at the gymnasium; you would have nothing to lift along the gangway but a rickle o' banes. Will you do it, Allan, lad—for the sake of old times—and let me shut my eyes in peace——"

She did not need to read any further; she knew what had been demanded of him; she saw how all the old comradeship was calling upon him to respond to this piteous cry of despair.

"Well indeed I am sorry for the poor man," said she, gently; but he broke in upon her in an excited sort of way.

"They're often mistaken—the doctors are continually mistaken," he said. "Consumption is especially deceptive ; I've known most remarkable recoveries. And who can tell—if I could get poor Alec taken away back to the island air—and the sweet milk and potatoes—and hearing his own tongue spoken around him——"

"But just now, Allan," said Jess, timidly regarding him, "your duty lies nearer at hand——"

And then, with her eyes anxiously watching him, she told him in a roundabout way of what had happened. At first he hardly seemed to follow her, so intently was his mind preoccupied with that pitiful sickbed in Glasgow ; but at length he got to understand that some incomprehensible mistake had been made, and that Barbara had actually been arrested, and was now locked up in one of the police-cells.

"Yes, yes, it is as you say, Jessie," he answered her. "I cannot go to Glasgow. We must look after Barbara first, and get her out of this extraordinary mishap. And will you come down to the police-station with me, Jessie ?—you seem always to know what is the best thing to be done."

She assented at once ; he went and fetched his cap ; and together they left the house. And even now he said something about the Glasgow train—showing that certain of his thoughts were still drawn away towards the dim sick-room and his dying friend. Then, by some effort of will, he seemed to recall himself.

"Tell me, Jessie, what this frightful blunder is all about, what is it they accuse Barbara of stealing ?"

"It's a blouse in tartan silk," Jess made answer ; "and I can see very well how the error may have arisen. For Barbara was speaking to me several times about that blouse ; she had a great fancy for it ; the Royal Stewart it was, and very pretty in the silk ; and if she had asked them to show it to her again, and if she was getting other things, then what more likely than that it might have been dragged away by her sleeve, and might have slipped off the counter, and fallen on the floor——"

"It is simply inconceivable that she should try to steal it or want to steal it !" he exclaimed. "Simply inconceivable ! Even if it were in her nature to covet and steal, where could the object have been ? She has had everything she

could think of—nothing grudged her—why, it was only yesterday that I was asking Mr. MacFadyen if I could commute my life insurance policy just to leave her a little more free in her expenditure. She is fond of finery—we all of us know that; and fond of appearances—well, who was ever blaming her? It always seemed to me a pretty kind of thing to see her decking herself out—a kind of childish vanity that was harmless enough; and there was no one checking her and finding fault with her, so that she should take to secrecy or underhand ways to appease this innocent craving. Jessie, it is not believable! If she had come to me I would have bought the silk tartan blouse for her, ay, even if I had to sell the half of my books——”

“Poor girl!” said Jess. “To think she’ll have to be in that terrible place for two whole weeks yet before she can be proved innocent and set free!”

They went down through the town; and Jess Maclean had got into a way of regarding the passers-by furtively and suspiciously—as if wondering whether they knew. It was not like Jess; but she seemed already to feel that some black shadow of disgrace hung over her and hers, no matter what the jury might say. And she did not talk much to Allan; these present events were too serious, too tragic, to admit of idle gossip, or even of make-believe professions of assurance and confidence.

Jess and her quiet and simple straightforwardness had found favour in the eyes of the Superintendent; when she and her companion entered the police-station, he at once called a constable and bade him conduct the visitors through to the cells. The warder’s wife also proved to be friendly; as soon as she had gone along the narrow corridor, and turned back the heavy bolt, it was clear that she meant her espionage to be entirely perfunctory; while Jess, with just as little mind to be a spectator of the meeting between husband and wife, remained with her, trying to frame an indifferent sentence or two. Allan advanced into the cell alone.

And yet there was no wild scene: Barbara did not spring to her feet and rush into her husband’s arms, eager to seek shelter there from all the perils that encompassed her.

Nay, when she saw who this was, she rather cowered away from him, until he went forward, and sate down by her, and took her hand in both of his.

"This is a sad affair, Barbara," he said to her, gently, "but we will soon get you free, and no great harm done. And did you not tell the McLennan's people they were making a mistake? Or maybe it was this way—maybe you were frightened—and not quite so quick with the English as the Gaelic—and very likely they would put a wrong construction on your confusion and alarm. But I will point all this out to Mr. Grant; you were bewildered for the moment, no doubt; and not ready with an explanation in English——"

She appeared hardly to listen.

"Is Jessie there?" she said, in a low voice.

"She is just outside the door—with the woman that has the keys," he answered her. "But you can tell me anything you like, Barbara—they are not hearkening——"

"I want Jess to come in," she said.

He rose from the bench and went to the door.

"Jessie," he said, "will you go to her? She wants you. And you know better than I what to say."

For a second Jess Maclean seemed to hesitate; it was like an intrusion between husband and wife; but the next moment she had stepped into the cell, while Allan shyly lingered without.

"Now you'll be of better heart, Barbara!" said she, cheerfully. "You'll be of better heart now, with your husband come to stand by you."

"He was not so angry as I expected," the girl responded, without raising her eyes.

"Angry? Who thought he would be angry? Who gave him the right to be angry? That is a fine thing to think of! Are we angry with any one that has a slate fall on him from the roof—or that is knocked down by a runaway horse? Angry because of an accident? It is hardly a time to be angry! No; but I am sure of this, that he is very, very sorry, as we all are; and every one of us will be doing our best to make amends to you, Barbara, when once we have got you set free, and the sooner that hour is here the better!"

Barbara remained silent for a little while ; then she said—in an undertone—

“Will the people be coming into the Court when there is the trial ?”

“I suppose so,” said Jess, doubtfully. “I’m not sure—I will ask Mr. Grant—but I think any one can come in that likes——”

“And they will be looking at me ?” said Barbara, with a kind of shiver. “Jessie, could you be with me ? Would they let you do that ? Could you come and sit with me ?”

“If there’s any one to be by your side, it ought to be your husband——”

“No, no—you, Jessie !” she said, hurriedly. “You. Could you come here for me, and go into the Court with me, and stay by me ? I am frightened, Jessie—and the people will be staring ; but if you were with me, it might be different—a little different. And did you say any one that liked ? Any one ? Mr. MacFadyen, maybe ?——”

“And if he did,” said Jess, warmly, “be sure he would come as a friend !”

“Ay—him—but there might be others—there might be others not so friendly—others may be glad to see you in such a position.” She glanced towards the partly-opened door. “Jess,” she said in a whisper, “do you think—Ogilvie—will be among the people in the Court ?”

And Jess also glanced quickly towards the door : happily she could hear that Allan was talking to the warder’s wife.

“I wonder at you, Barbara !” she said, under her breath. “It is not of Ogilvie you should be thinking at such a time !”

Some few minutes thereafter Jess Maclean and Allan left together ; and there was little speech between these two—there was none at all on the part of Jess, indeed, for her latest interview with Mr. Grant, the solicitor, had aroused in her certain strange misgivings, that for the present at least she kept resolutely locked away in the unconfessed recesses of her mind. But as they crossed over by the railway-station, there was some slight disturbance—one or two laggard travellers hurrying to the ticket-office,

the half-past four train for the South being just about to start.

"Poor Alec MacNeil!" said the schoolmaster, in an absent kind of fashion. "But I will telegraph to him. And if everything is going well with Barbara, then maybe after all I'll be able to run through to Glasgow, and see if I cannot get him taken away to his beloved Colonsay."

And Jess—whose first thought was ever and always for him who was at this moment her companion, and for his lonely life—that now seemed to be lonelier than it had ever been before—Jess said in quick communing with herself:

"A good thing. For if this matter goes ill with Barbara—if the worst should come to the worst—it will be some distraction for Allan that from time to time he must needs keep thinking of his distant friend."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PLEADING DIET.

DARK and sinister rumours and exaggerations of rumours went flying through Duntroone with regard to the unhappy young woman now under arrest; and while the friends and acquaintances of Mrs. Maclean indignantly scouted these fatuities, they nevertheless rather refrained from looking in upon Jess and her mother: to offer sympathy in present circumstances might prove to be invidious; on the other hand, when the verdict of acquittal had been pronounced, they could come forward to tender their congratulations without reserve. The little widow said nothing, but she was well aware of this temporary desertion; occasionally, when she thought nobody was by, a tear would trickle down her cheek; and the small well-worn Bible that she kept in the back-parlour now frequently took the place of the county paper. Once, when she had been summoned across the way, she left the volume open on the table; and, when she had gone, Jess slipped round to see what passages

her mother had been communing with. These were the verses that caught her eye : ‘Cast me not off in the time of old age ; forsake me not when my strength faileth. . . . For mine enemies speak against me ; and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together, . . . Saying, God hath forsaken him : persecute and take him ; for there is none to deliver him. . . . O God, be not far from me : O my God, make haste for my help.’

Not that all her neighbours held aloof. One morning Long Lanchlan the shoemaker called, stepped into the parlour, and, unasked, took a seat.

“I am sorry, Mrs. Maclean,” said he, in English, “for the trouble that has come upon your niece Barbara. Ay, I was jist fearing something of the kind might happen. For when her father’s funeral was getting near to the cemetery, at Knockalanish, there was a black collie ran right across the road in front of us ; and we couldna put down the coffin from our shoulders to chase after the dog and get him killed ; and when we came ont again we could not see the beast anywhere ; and more than one was saying ‘Well, until that dog is killed there will be ill-luck for the family of poor Donald Maclean.’ That’s what they were saying ; and that is what has come about. But we must jist do for the best ; and it’s me that’s wishing to help ; and when the poor lass is brought to the trial—well, I would like to be a witness to character——”

“You, Lanchie ?”

“Ay, me,” continued Lanchlan, detecting no surprise in the widow’s tone. “And you would be astonished, Mrs. Maclean, if I was telling you the proportion of Rechabites there is to the people of this country-side. And do you not think that out of the fifteen jurymen there will be three or four Rechabites ?—ay, and mebbe the chancellor of the jury himself ? Then they will see me—and I hef been made a Guardian of our Tent—I am an office-bearer——”

“I’m sure I’m glad to hear of anything that keeps you from the whisky, Lanchlan,” said the widow, absently.

“Me !—Mrs. Maclean !—the whisky ?” ejaculated Lanchlan, sorely hurt. “I wonder you would say that ! Mebbe in former days I might tek a glass when they were hard at me and forcin’ me to it ; but now—now—ah, me, my good

friend, I wish I could get ye to understand what a perfect heaven upon earth the strict teetotalism is! It is so, indeed! Aw, but it's sweet, sweet, to rise in the mornin', and there's no thirst in your throat, and there's no fearful seeckness in your inside, and your head is as clear as a bell—ye must try it—I'm sure ye would be thanking me if ye'd only try it, Mrs. Maclean——”

“Haud your haverings!” said Jess, breaking in angrily. “My mother's as temperate as anyone in Duntroone—and far more than most——”

But Lauchlan shook his head, in a despairing way.

“She doesna belong to the fold yet. There's ahlways the fear of backsliding. I hef myself seen a bottle standing on that very table now before me. And at the wedding—there was sad doings at the schoolmaster's wedding—I sah the glasses and the bottles spread out—fearful—fearful——”

“We've a great many things to think of at present, Mr. MacIntyre,” said Jess, sharply.

“Ay, jist that,” responded Lauchlan, with good-natured acquiescence, and he rose from his chair. “Ye'll not forget, then, Mrs. Maclean, that I'll be a witness to character, if the lawyers want me. Ye see, I'm in an official poseetion now. And there's sure to be some Rechabites on the jury—mebbe the chancellor himself. Well, good-bye to you; and to you, Miss Jessie; and I am hoping there will be good luck at the trial, in spite of the black dog that ran across the funeral at Knockalanish.”

But the one friend who at this crisis stood indefatigably and assiduously by them was distinctly the town-councillor. Mr. McFadyen, eager, important, restless, buzzed about the little parlour, and hurried along for consultation with Mr. Grant, and hurried back; and all his talk was as of one learned in the law; he fairly astounded the women with his display of legal knowledge—about the precognitions of the witnesses—the warrants for citations—lists of articles labelled and to be produced—service copies of indictments—pleas admitted in bar of trial—objections to relevancy of the libel—and so forth; and Mrs. Maclean, if she did not quite, or even half, understand, was at least profoundly grateful for his intervention and championship. Jess, on the other hand, silent and watchful, began to suspect that

a good part of this brave magniloquence was used as a cloak of concealment. He could not, for example, be brought to give them precise details of the story told by McLennan the draper. He would rather come back to the mere mechanism of the trial ; and above all he would insist that neither mother nor daughter should go to the Court-house on either of the two days.

"What could you do?" he said, addressing himself especially to the widow. "The Pleading Diet in particular is a mere matter of form. Barbara will simply have to say she is Not Guilty ; and then she will be taken back to the cells, to await the real trial. There'll be no jury for you to look at, to see if there might be a friend or two amongst them. And forbye that, Mrs. Maclean, I'm sure ye would just be shocked and distressed beyond measure at the common-place, ordinary, business-like character of the whole proceedings. You would think the people heartless. And so they are, and necessarily so ; the law is a machine, of cogs, and wheels, and levers ; and it turns out this, or turns out that, without caring a straw. Dod, I tell ye the fellows can sign away a poor creature's life just as if it was a barrel o' raisins——"

"Mr. McFadyen," said the widow, "where will they put my poor lass ?—where will she be, when she comes before all the people ?"

Mr. McFadyen was silent for a second, and his face burned red ; none the less he was equal to the occasion ; he managed to answer her without mentioning the word 'dock.'

"Oh, well, Mrs. Maclean, it's this way," he said. "She will be in what you might call the well of the Court ; Mr. Grant will be there, and the Fiscal, and the Sheriff-clerk at the table ; and if she is in a kind of pew by herself, you see that is like the jury—they have boxes for themselves along one side of the central square. It's the Sheriff who is the big man—he is up on the platform——"

"She'll not be in a prison-dress ?" asked the widow, with troubled looks.

At this the councillor laughed, strenuously and stormily.

"Prison-dress !" he said. "In the eye of the law she is as innocent as you or me ! Prison-dress indeed ! The only

prison-dress ye're likely to see about anywhere in Duntroone the now is the over-all Johnnie Stevenson has for saving his clothes up on the links ; and indeed an angry man at golf is the better of some such covering, when he's striking and smashing half the county of Argyll into the air."

At length the morning arrived on which Barbara was to appear in court for the first time ; and at an early hour Jess stole away up to the house in Battery Terrace. During these past few days she had been in the habit of paying hidden little visits, especially at such times as she thought the schoolmaster was likely to be absent, so that she could see that things were being properly looked after. But on this occasion, when she had finished with the maidservant, she sent word to Allan to apprise him of her being there ; and as soon as he had made his appearance the two of them set out together, making down for the town. And very speedily she discovered that her companion was bitterly impatient over the law's delay.

"What is the object of all this tomfoolery?" he demanded. "The prisoner should be allowed to plead 'Guilty' or 'Not Guilty' when the first declaration is made ; and the case brought for trial directly—or with a fair time for getting the witnesses together. Just think, Jessie, of these days and days going by ; and poor Alec MacNeil in his lonely lodgings, wondering why I do not come for him. Of course, I could not tell him the real reason. He would not believe such a story. Do you remember, Jess?—he was accusing me of being one of the lucky ones! Ah, well ; perhaps some night he may fall asleep ; and when his eyes open, they may find before them shores whiter even than the shores of Colonsay——"

"Allan," said Jess, after a moment, "could I not be of some use? Could I not go through to Glasgow? My mother knows the Captain of the *Dunara Castle* very well ; and if I could get your friend that is so ill taken as far as Greenock, then I am sure he would want nothing in the way of kindness——"

"Ah, no, no, Jessie," he said, hastily. "That is where I would like to be myself—giving poor Alec a last chance ; but you—you must be here—we could not be without you here ; when Barbara wants anything done for her, it

is you that she asks for. And I do not wonder—I do not wonder.”

They were now nearing the Court-house ; and as Jess Maclean’s quick and apprehensive scrutiny told her that there were certain idlers gathered about the entrance, scorn and black hatred burned in her heart, and were only too visible in her eyes as well.

“The dolts !” she said, between her teeth. “Have they no work to do, that they must come to stare at a poor creature in distress !”

But the schoolmaster took no heed of these people—no more than if they had been empty wheelbarrows and pick-axes cumbering the highway. He went by them unnoticed ; he ascended the wide, hollow-sounding, stone steps ; he entered the lofty, bare-looking hall ; and took one of the nearest seats, making room for Jess beside him. Here, also, two or three spectators had assembled ; but they were mostly strangers ; for the rest, Lauchlan the shoemaker had come along, in his Sunday clothes ; and from one of the farthest back benches the elfin eyes of Niall Gorach glowered and twinkled.

At this moment the well of the court, the dock, the witness-box, the jury boxes, and the raised platform on which stood the Sheriff’s chair of office and his desk—all these were as yet empty ; the business of the day had not begun. And it may be said that the appearance of this provincial hall of justice did credit to Duntroone ; the pew-like benches and the woodwork generally were of polished and shining pitch-pine ; the walls and roof were bright and clean ; there were tall and well-proportioned windows looking both to the south and west ; and if most of these windows were dimly blinded over, at least one of them gave a view of the clear outer world—beyond the roofs of the huddled houses was visible the distant azure sweep of Ardentrive Bay, above that again were the sunny slopes of Kerrara, and over these the pale-blue mountains of Mull, those of them that lie about Loch Speliv and Loch Don.

But presently this one and that of the officials began to come in, making for their accustomed places by the central table : the Sheriff-clerk, the Procurator-Fiscal, the agents, and the like ; while Peter McFadyen, after a final word with

Mr. Grant, slipped into the pew next the dock, taking his seat by the side of Allan Henderson. Jess was trembling a little. She seemed to know that the eyes of the people behind her were directed to a certain door in front of her—over by the corner of the hall; and she also was listening for footsteps. What the lawyers in the well of the court were doing mattered nothing to her. She was half-afraid to find Barbara appear. Would there not be some terrible reproach—some accusation even—in the mute glance of the prisoner? For they had received this poor lass in charge, when she was left destitute out in the far island; and was this what they had allowed her to come to?

Then her heart stood still. The red pine door at the corner was opened. A policeman led the way. Next came Barbara; and at the first glimpse of her Jess thought she looked fearfully ill; but was it not that her eyes, grown accustomed to the grey twilight of the cell, were partly blinded by this unexpected glare? She followed obediently, and was directed into the dock; and if, during these few yards, she had managed to take some brief and shuddering survey of the people assembled, it was done so swiftly as to escape notice. Her eyes appeared to be fixed on the ground as she passed in to occupy the chair awaiting her. She remained with her head bent down. She seemed to pay no attention—to make no effort to understand all this that was going on in court: the various formalities—the questions put and answered—the business-like, half-pathetic conversation with the prosecution and the defence.

But of a sudden the strangest thing occurred. Her eyes must have been wandering a little, however coweringly and fearfully; they must have been attracted to the window that gave a view of the shimmering blue sea, and the yellow slopes, and the pallid azure mountains of Mull; and to this poor imprisoned creature a sight of the far hills was as the sound of the Alphorn to the Swiss soldier in the Strassburg trenches. She uttered a piteous little cry. Involuntarily she stretched forth her hands, and she would have risen from her seat and made in some wild way for that vision of the shining free world without.

“Let me go!” she exclaimed, in a panting, half-choked

voice that thrilled those who heard. "Oh, let me get out—let me go!"

Jess could not reach her; Peter McFadyen was bewildered, and knew not what to do; it was Mr. Grant, her agent, who stepped quickly across from the table, and put his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Be still—be still now!" he said in a loud and persuasive voice—for the Sheriff, in all the severe majesty of wig and gown, had had his attention attracted by this slight disturbance, and was now regarding the prisoner curiously. "We will do our best to get you out. Indeed, indeed we will. You must just sit quiet, and attend to anything that may be asked of you. And when you are called on to plead, you know what you have to say."

And so she withdrew her hopeless eyes from the warm splendour of that outer world; she sank into her seat again; and resigned herself to what was going on. But she did not seem to comprehend, any more than hitherto, what that was; and they did not bother her very much; when she was called upon to plead 'Guilty or Not Guilty,' she succeeded in uttering the two words required of her, and these were forthwith recorded by the clerk. By and bye the policeman at the end of the dock opened the small door and intimated to her that she was now to leave; his brother officer, who had been standing just behind her during the proceedings, prepared to follow; and thus escorted the prisoner moved away out of the sight of her friends, disappearing down the narrow stone staircase communicating with the yard and the cells.

Jess and Allan Henderson descended together into the front street.

"Jessie," said he, "do you not think I might go through to Glasgow now? You see how aimless all this routine is; and there is nothing further to be done until the jury-trial—when they will pronounce her innocent, and set her free. I can be of no use. On the other hand, the cry of a dying man rings in one's ears—an appeal from a death-bed is not to be thrust aside——"

"Poor Allan!" said Jess. "I can see how you are torn two ways." She hesitated for a moment. "But maybe—maybe it would be safer for you to ask Mr. Grant. He

might wish to consult you. Then if there's nothing more to be done about the witnesses—then you might hurry through to Glasgow, and at least show to your friend that you were not heartlessly neglecting him."

A stealthy step came following her: she was touched on the arm.

"You need have no fear," whispered the crouching Niall Gorach; and he spoke eagerly in the Gaelic tongue. "It is I that will get her out of the prison, this night. As sure as the Good Being is above us, I am telling the truth. And the *Selma*—the *Selma* will be leaving the North Quay at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, for Tobermory and the outer isles; and will you be there to take your cousin down into the cabin, so that no one will see her?—"

Jess turned to the loose-witted youth.

"What cantrip is this now, Niall?" said she. It was no time for folly; and yet she could not bring herself to speak harshly to the lad.

But already Niall had left her side: he was making across the highway towards Long Lauchie—towards Lauchlan the regenerate and respectable, who was walking solemnly homeward in his Sunday clothes.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A BREAKING AND ENTERING.

BUT Long Lauchie was obdurate. He refused to listen to these mysterious and insidious hints; he forgot all about old alliances and adventures; nay, from the lofty heights of his new-found virtue, he sternly admonished this gangrel-youth.

"What are you growing up to?" said he. "It's the gallows will be the end of you—I'm sure of that. No lessons like any other lad—no apprenticeship to any decent trade—hiding and jinking about the country like a gipsy——"

"If we could get the black-haired lass out of jail," said

Niall, with his eyes burning eagerly, "and sent away by the steamer to-morrow morning, it's Mrs. Maclean and Jessie Maclean would be fine and glad of that. But it would need a great deal of thick twine—a fearful lot—and rosin——"

"Away now!" said Lauchlan, scowling. "I'll have nothing more to do wi' you and your tricks. I tell ye, it's the gallows will end you—son of the devil that you are!"

Well, Niall was in nowise cast down; his discursive wits were nimble, and had already contemplated many alternatives; he would manage to get cord and twine somehow. And in the meantime he drew away from these straggling groups of people; he left the town by the Soroba road; and at last, when he had got up on the summit he clambered over a wire fence and entered a plantation of young larch and fir. Amongst the thick undergrowth he searched for and found a worn and tattered game-bag that he had hidden there on the previous day; and with this in his hand he crept still further into the twilight of the wood, and disappeared.

It was a long while ere he returned to the fence; and the first objects that caught his sight were three children returning from school—an elder girl of thirteen or so, and two younger ones. As they came up, he stepped out into the roadway.

"Daftie!—daftie!" called one of the small imps—and ran away laughing; while the other one, half-giggling and half-frightened, as quickly ran after her. This behaviour on the part of her charges seemed greatly to shame and annoy the elder girl, who was a quiet, wise-like little woman of fair complexion and timid, large blue eyes.

"You've been at the school?" said Niall to her.

"Yes," said she, still blushing hotly over the misconduct of her companions.

"Mebbe you can write?"

"Yes."

"That's a strange thing now," continued Niall; "a wonderful strange thing that you can put words down on paper, and tek them away, and they are as good as a message to any one. Will ye show me now?—will ye show me how ye do it? See, here's a piece of paper—and mebbe you've a pencil—let me see you write what I will tell you;

and when I get to Duntroone, I will be asking them if they can read it."

Perhaps the small lass felt that she owed him some little piece of civility ; at all events she brought out her pencil and wrote for him the words he dictated, which were these : *' If you can use the file, at the window or the door, and get into the yard, you will find a rope hanging over the wall.'*

" But that is silliness," said she. " No one will understand that."

" Aw, it will do very well," said Niall, in an offhand fashion. " I am sure I am wishing I could write myself." And with that he folded up the bit of paper, and put it in his pocket ; leaving the small maiden to continue on her way and overtake her companions—whom she probably slapped well for their impudence.

Niall's next encounter was with *Lucais fiar-shuileach*—that is to say, cross-eyed Luke—the keeper, who was coming along with a brace of setters at his heels.

" What's in your bag, Niall ? " he called out. " After the young black game, you scoundrel ? "

" Oh, no, Mr. Innes, I would not do that ; there's nothing but sticks ! " said Niall—and of his own accord he opened the large and ragged bag.

But the keeper was not suspicious. Niall was an old acquaintance and dependent of his, receiving from him many an odd job in the shooting season, for among all the youths and lads about there was none so indefatigable in beating through the woods as Niall Gorach. And on this occasion Niall had not lied ; the bag was really half-filled with sticks ; the only thing was that if *Lucais fiar-shuileach* had been a little more particular in his examination he would have perceived that these pieces of wood were carefully cut about the same length, and that each had a notch incised at the middle. The squint-eyed keeper resumed his march, carelessly whistling the praises of the Lass of Loch Etive ; while Niall, shouldering his bag again, proceeded down the hill, until he neared the swampy morass lying at the back of the town.

Now all round this neighbourhood there is a wide tract of land chiefly given over to the goods department of the railway—detached wooden sheds, sidings for trucks, and

the like occupying the loose space in a kind of promiscuous manner ; while generally there are one or two of the clerks or porters coming or going, because of the short-cut to the next platform. Accordingly Niall Gorach made his way across this outlying suburb without attracting any particular attention ; nor did any spying gaze follow him as he drew nearer and nearer to the wall surrounding the exercise-yard of the police-prison. Arrived there, his movements were rapid ; for he at once proceeded to get the sticks out of the bag, placing them in little handfuls along the base of the wall, where they were effectually screened from view by the rough herbage—docks, sorrels, ragwort, and so forth—that grew luxuriantly about. Curiously enough, in this place of coverture there was also a long row of stones of considerable size that had apparently been carefully secreted there ; indeed, if these stones had been sufficiently dark to resemble coal, any inquisitive passer-by might very warrantably have imagined that this youth was bent on some daft project of setting the whole of the police-buildings on fire. However, Niall, having deposited these pieces of wood behind the tall weeds, slung his bag over his shoulder, and, with an apparently vacuous look on his face, set out for the back-street in Duntroone that afforded him a small den of a lodging. He had first of all to get some scrap of food ; and then to wait for the night.

But it was a long waiting, at this time of the year. The evening and the sunset came together—a fiery sunset that burned fierce and wild behind the Mull and Morven hills ; then that was succeeded by a clear and lambent after-glow, in which the plum-hued mountains became dark and vaporous ; ten o'clock arrived, and the heavens and the sea had grown to be of a pale, ethereal lilac ; nevertheless, far away on the still plain, here and there a small jet-black speck of a boat showed no sign of returning. Niall was down on the beach now, talking to Angus MacIsaac ; both of them, with more or less of resignation, regarding one of those distant dots. From the trees below the ancient castle came the sharp, harsh cry of the tawny owl, and along the higher woods in the east sounded a more protracted and softer *ioo-hoo-hoo-hoo* !—a strange and unearthly call that found an answer somewhere in the gathering

twilight. The Maiden Island was of a keen and sharp-cut ebony against the slow-fluctuating and visionary mists lying about Lismore. A three-quarters moon had come up and over the Sound of Kerrara, and underneath was a long and vivid pathway of golden flame, narrowing and widening here and there, until it seemed to lose itself in a sprinkled radiance among the spars and rigging of the small cutters moored close by. And at last, through the magical silence, came the first muffled sound of oars.

Nor yet did Niall leave his companion; not until the smooth-gliding boat had finally been brought in and hauled up on the beach. Then Angus MacIsaac, his day's work over, briefly said good-night and went away home to his supper; while Niall, now deeming himself secure, made straight off for the wooden house in which MacIsaac kept his dismantled craft and also his store of ship's-chandlery.

This long, low shanty was erected on a piece of waste ground immediately behind the Great Western Hotel; so that, when Niall reached it, it was obscure and almost invisible in the gloom thrown by the greater building. The half-witted lad's movements had clearly been premeditated. From a hidden corner he picked up his game-bag; by means of the fence belonging to the hotel, he easily clambered on to the boat-house; the window in the roof had been left open for ventilation, and he still further opened it; he shoved his legs and body through, and swung himself down inside; from the bag he took out and lit a dark lantern; and now he found himself in this place of strange forms and vague shadows, with its all-pervading odour of paint and tar. Then, aided by the bull's-eye of the lantern, he began his eager exploration. It was cordage he was in quest of—by preference cordage about the thickness of the signal-halyards of a small yacht; but it was evident that he was not very scrupulous in his harryings. Cordage new or old—guy-ropes—mizzen-sheets—nothing came amiss; until, finally, he sat himself down in a sheltered place behind an old boat, and there, by the light of the carefully shaded lamp, he began to cut all his tackle into equal lengths, firmly tying near the middle of each length two of the notched pieces of stick, with about a foot's width between them.

It was an arduous and tedious task ; but Niall was resolute ; and eventually he had both of the large pockets of his game-bag crammed full with those lengths of cord. Thereupon he extinguished the lamp ; he slung the bag over his shoulder ; he mounted on the upturned keel of a boat and managed to spring cat-like to the joists supporting the roof : from thence he clambered through the window, slid down, and dropped to the ground below.

But by this time there was a white moonlight filling all the world ; the esplanade was startlingly distinct ; and the silence was so profound that the almost glass-like sea could be heard murmuring for a great distance round the smooth bays and the rocks. Middle of the night as it was, Niall dared not go along that exposed front, nor risk attracting the attention of some stray policemen by even the most stealthy of footfalls. By a circuitous route he got away to the back of Duntroone ; he followed a winding valley, and climbed up, and passed through the woods of Ardconnel ; and then, cautiously descending again, drew near to the environs of the goods-station. Here, even if he were perceived, he would not be so much remarked ; he would most likely be taken for some official of the line going about his nocturnal duties.

Presently, in the same furtive fashion, he had crept up to the lofty wall surrounding the exercise-yard of the police-building ; and now he was tolerably safe, being in a black shadow cast by the strong moonlight. Forthwith he set to work. He got out the long lengths of cord ; and to the end of each tied one of the big stones he had previously concealed behind the docks and thistles. When he had a number of these engines prepared, he thought he would try one ; so, getting to his feet again, he took the stone in his hand and heaved it over the high wall. There was but a slight noise as it fell on the ashes on the other side. Then he took the hither end of the cord, and began hitching with it a little, until he had got one of the pieces of stick on each side of the top of the wall, which fortunately for him, was protected neither by glass, nor spikes, nor any sort of chevaux de frise. His calculations had been made with sufficient accuracy. The near end of the cord, hanging down, just about touched the weeds.

The paramount question was—how many of these stones must he needs get over in order (along with the friction of the pieces of wood at the summit) to withstand his own weight, slight as that might be ? But then he had ravaged Angus MacIsaac's boat-house to some purpose ; the abundance of signal-halyards, gny-ropes, jib-sheets, and the like, tempted him to make surer and still more sure ; until, in the end, standing upright, he began to plait and overlap these strands into some rude resemblance of a cable. Thereto he was in a measure aided by the sticks at the top ; but anyhow, if the scaling-ladder was of the simplest and most rough-and-ready description, it at all events promised to bear his weight.

He pulled ; nothing gave. He hauled still more determinedly ; everything seemed secure. And then he began to ascend—warily—twisting his feet round the rope—and fending himself off with knee and elbow. At first his progress was easy enough ; but higher up the strain on the intertwisted cords was rather bad for his knuckles ; nevertheless the pieces of wood helped ; and at length, with one hand on the smooth and conical summit of the wall, he managed to raise himself so that he could peer over into the yard. There was no sign of life anywhere. The open square was of a pallid and silvery grey ; so was the front of the one-storeyed wing, the small barred windows of which revealed the whereabouts of the cells ; but the other buildings were in an intense shadow, along which any interloper might creep with comparative impunity. And now Niall Gorach, grown bold, threw a leg over the wall ; and took up his position there—with all this white and spectral universe around him, with the solemn peaks of Ben Cruachan, too, rising into the far and clear heavens, beyond the dusky and wooded hills. Perhaps he did not notice that the metallic splendour of the moonlight, touching sea, and cliff, and house-front, was already beginning to yield to a more ordinary greyness, especially up towards the east. Niall was busy. For the sake of his own escape, or for the escape of the captive whom he had come to release, he had to reverse the ingenious mechanism by which he had practically gained entrance. He had to unplait the improvised rope ; with each strand he hauled up a stone, to

be dropped on the outer side of the wall ; and then, when he had roughly reunited the cords on the inner side, and made sure that the outer weight held, he quietly slipped down the cable, and found himself in the yard.

But now he could mistake no longer : the new day was near : the cold and penetrating light was gradually dispersing those sombre shadows. And how was he to tell which of the row of small, barred windows was the one that held imprisoned the black-haired girl ? How was he to communicate with her ? How was he to convey to her the file, concealed in the breast of his jacket, that had round it the pencilled message ? He could pitch the file through one of these windows easily enough ; but it might fall into an empty cell. Niall looked back to the twisted cords : it might after all be better to make good his own retreat—until he should have acquired more accurate information.

The next moment, in the mystic hush and silence of the grey dawn, there was a sudden rattle and clamour as of twenty parks of artillery, simultaneously bursting forth into roar and flame. Niall cowered under the doorway leading to the Court-house ; and remained there, breathless and motionless. Presently, after this loud and harsh unbolting of locks and bars, the big, stalwart warder stepped out into the open ; he was clad only in trousers, shirt, and waistcoat ; he had obviously come forth to have his morning pipe in the fresh air ; and he proceeded to strike a match on the clay bowl. The head of the lucifer dropped off and fell at his feet ; with a friendly curse he flung the stem after it ; then he rummaged in his pockets—in vain ; then he turned and went inside again, leaving the ponderous door open. It was Niall's opportunity—come what might. He darted across the yard, and entered ; he listened for the warder's footsteps ; he took the opposite direction—which led him right into the corridor of the cells ; and as he now heard someone coming from the other end, he dodged into the only corner available, which chanced to be the bath-room. Here there was a vast display, not only of towels, but also of coloured blankets ; and as these were arranged in shelves, Niall, by throwing himself prone on the floor, and creeping underneath, he found a hiding-place of admirable security. Moreover, he could see what was going on without.

The new-comer who had startled him now made her appearance ; it was the warder's wife, a good-natured-looking woman ; and it was in a friendly voice that she said, when she had lifted the flap of the small aperture in the door of the nearest cell—

“ Good-morning !—and I hope you slept well. And I'm sure Miss Jessie will be coming to see you the day.”

What the reply was Niall could not hear ; but this was enough for him ; the black-haired lass was there—in the cell close by ; and as soon as the woman was gone, what could hinder his passing in the file, with its written directions ? And if she were but quick-brained and active, surely she could soon get rid of the trifling stanchions across the window ? And then the plaited rope awaiting her—and the busy day not yet abroad—the fair-haired cousin looking for her down at the pier—and the *Selma* about to sail for the outer isles ?—all was going well now, and he had done what he could to repay the many little kindnesses and friendly looks of Jess Maclean.

Alas ! at the very moment of success and triumph he was baffled and captured—and captured most ignominiously. For just as he had stolen into the corridor and was in the act of raising the leather flap so that he might drop the file into the interior of the cell, the warder's wife chanced to return ; and without any scream, but with astonished eyes, she flew forward at this stranger and seized hold of him, at first by the collar, eventually by the ear.

“ You—you young sinner—is it you, Niall Gorach—and how have you come in here ! And what was that you were doing ? . . . Are you there, John—John ! ”

In answer to the summons the bulky warder came sedately along ; and when he saw who this was, he seemed inclined to take a humorous view of the case.

“ Well, well, you young weasel, you have got in ; but how are you going to get out ? And how did you get in ? Did you come through the front office ? For if you did, it's there you're going back ; and we will see what the sergeant will be saying to you. Was you ever hearing of Paul and Silas ? ” continued the warder, as he inserted his knuckles under the collar of Niall's jacket. “ Paul and Silas, that had many stripes laid on them, before they were cast into

the prison, and had their feet made fast in the stocks? Was it that you were after? Well, no matter, we'll go and see the sergeant."

So the unhappy Niall was haled away; and when they had left the building (this time the warder took care not to leave the door open behind him) he was taken across the exercise-yard, and so into the police-station. There was a constable walking up and down; the sergeant sate at his desk reading a newspaper; an old charwoman was on her knees at the front steps, scrubbing the red sandstone.

"What are we to do with this rascal?" said the warder, dragging his captive in with him.

The reply was unexpected. With a sudden twist and a spring Niall flung himself on to the intervening counter; the impetus carried him right across the smooth surface; he lit, not on his head, but on his hands—knocking over the old woman and her pail; and the next instant he was upon his feet and with the speed of a hare making away for the south end of the harbour and for the crags and bushes under the Gallows Hill.

"Will I run after him?" cried the dumbfounded constable to his sergeant.

But the sergeant leisurely grinned.

"Run after Niall Gorach? Ay. And mebbe you would try to catch a squirrel by climbing a tree? It's the devil will catch him, and no other; and I'm thinking old Beelzebub will hef his hands full, when that time comes!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

ASPHODELS AND GOWANS.

WHEN the servant-lass Sarah appeared at the door of Mr. McFadyen's office and announced that Miss Jessie Maclean had called and had been shown into the parlour, the councillor betrayed an instant alarm.

"Dod bless my soul!" he exclaimed—heedless of the presence of his clerk. "Without the least intimation! Is

everything trim, woman? Is everything redd-up and respectable?" Then he remembered something—and his vexation broke forth in vicious terms: "Ye stupid idjit, how long is it since I was telling ye about the curtains and the sofa-cover!—how long is it since I bade ye take them off and send them to Perth to be cleaned? But no—no!" he continued, as he hastily passed his hands over his topmost and scant locks of hair. "Never a thing done! All ye're fit for is to stand glowering! And what on earth are ye glowering at now? It doesna occur to ye to whip off and bring in some tea? Ye never heard of such a thing as tea, I suppose? Ye never saw a teapot, I'll be bound! A great, glowering baggage—a great, glowering, staring, open-mouthed gowk—" But while the councillor was excitedly and angrily dusting his coat-collar with his silk pocket-handkerchief, Sarah the servant-lass had with much equanimity turned away and betaken herself to the kitchen. In her own language she never 'fashed her heid about a daft man.' If tea had to be prepared, hurry was the most likely thing to spoil it. And the parlour was just as tidy as it ordinarily was: if any one wanted it better, notice should have been sent.

But the town-councillor was far from being waspish and truculent when he passed through from his office to the dwelling-house part of the premises. He welcomed his unexpected visitor with quite an excess of courtesy and gay gallantry; until Jess, who was of a simple and straightforward turn of mind, rather put these unnecessary professions aside.

"Mr. McFadyen," said she, regarding him with her grey eyes, "I want you to tell me: are you hiding anything from us? Is the case against Barbara more serious than Mr. Grant and you would have us believe? Why has he nothing for us but vague assurances that mean nothing at all? I do not object to your saying little to Allan Henderson—poor Allan! you see he's very childish and perverse in some ways; he does not understand—and will not understand; he has but the one mood just now—a fuming impatience that they should be so long in setting Barbara free; and when she is set free—well, then, I should not be surprised if he took a thick stick in his hand, and marched

straight down to the haberdasher's shop, and broke the stick over McLennan's shoulders. It would be just like Allan—he is that unreasoning and masterful—he thinks that justice should be done somehow——”

“Na, na, but not that way!” cried the councillor, anxiously. “We’ve had enough of cells, and charges, and prosecutions; I tell ye I never get a glimpse o’ the Court-house, but a shiver runs down my back. I’ll be thankful for the time when we can look on the whole o’ this as an old story—half-forgotten——”

But Jess was not to be put off.

“Mr. McFadyen,” said she, “what were the things that the police took away when they went up with McLennan’s man to search through Barbara’s boxes and drawers?”

“Oh, well,” said Peter, evasively, “a few articles—the Procurator Fiscal has them in charge, and they are all sealed and labelled. Of course Mr. Grant has the right of access to them—no mistake about that—he is entitled to see the productions, as they are called; but what I maintain is that, as the accused’s agent, he ought to have access to the precognitions as well. For I would ask ye this,” continued Mr. McFadyen, gaining in breath, and in importance, “how are ye to meet a charge unless ye know particularly and in every point what the charge is? The information that Her Majesty’s Advocate, the Right Honourable John Blair Balfour, puts into the indictment is precious little; as a friend of the prisoner, I want to see what evidence is going to be led—and I maintain that is what the law should allow me. However, we can make a bit of a guess here and there; and these things ye speak of, they can help too—there’s the red parasol, for example——”

“Yes, the red parasol?” Jess repeated, quickly.

“Well,” said Mr. McFadyen, after a moment’s hesitation, “they may be trying to make some idle story about that too; but your cousin declares that she paid for it—and that she remembers, for you gave her the money——”

“I did?” said Jess—and for the briefest second she looked utterly dismayed. But the next instant she had pulled herself together. “And—and if I did—why not?” she demanded, with pale lips. “It was before she was married——”

"That's just it," returned the councillor, whose pride of knowledge was leading him into disclosures. "Mebbe they will be trying to show that at that time she had no money to afford such things——"

"But if I had!—if I had!" exclaimed Jess, who had recovered from her temporary trepidation. "Barbara knew well enough where to come; she would not think of hesitating; my purse was hers; there was the money for the parasol, or for anything else she wished, always ready for her——"

"I'm sure of that—I'm sure of that," said McFadyen. "And no doubt Mr. Grant will be giving you a hint what questions he will ask of you at the trial—if the prosecution should chance to take that line, and if you should be wanted. And you must not worry yourself or be anxious, Miss Jessie; precognitions or no precognitions, we'll do our best——"

There was a tapping at the door: the large, rubicund, gooseberry-eyed servant-lass appeared, and ushered in another visitor—it was the schoolmaster.

"I was told you had come here," said he to Jess, forgetting to make any apology for the interruption. "And—and I have but a few minutes. Will you read this?"

He put a telegram into her hand: these were the words she found before her—

'Good-bye. Not able to write. Alec.'

"You see I have no alternative," the schoolmaster continued, hurriedly. "I must go through to Glasgow at once; there is just time for me to catch the train. Only, I wanted to say a word to you, Jessie——"

"Will you let me walk to the station with you, Allan?" she responded promptly. "Then you can tell me on the way what it is you want of me."

"Will you do that?" said he. "Ay, but you were ever and always the goodhearted one!"

Jess nodded a friendly farewell to the councillor; and the next minute she and Allan were passing quickly along the harbour-front, conversing in low tones, their eyes occasionally glancing towards the clock at the railway-station. Yet it was no elaborate request he had to make; it was merely that she should seek the earliest opportunity

of gaining an interview with Barbara, and explain to her why he had been thus hastily summoned away. Also, would Jess do what she could to lighten the burden of this inexplicable imprisonment? But he knew she would do that—she could not help it, he said to her—it was in her nature.

She accompanied him along the platform, where the guard was urging the last of the passengers into the carriages. As Allan stepped into a third-class compartment, he suddenly paused for a moment, and began to search one pocket after another.

“You’ve forgotten your pipe!” said she.

She saw that her surmise was true; and in another second she was off and down the platform to the tobacconist’s stall, where she was able—being known to the lad in charge—to pounce without question or delay on a wooden pipe and a packet of bird’s-eye. When she returned to the carriage, the train was already in motion. She handed her parting gifts in at the window.

“And you’ll look after Barbara?” said he.

“That will I,” she answered, “as well as I can.” And she waited until the slow-moving string of carriages had crawled round the curve, and was hidden from sight.

This was the afternoon train for the south; and by the time it had panted, and shrieked, and thundered its way inland by the shores of Loch Etive and through the Pass of Brander, the wide, silver-rippling, and glancing waters of Loch Awe had begun to assume a slightly golden hue, rendered all the more brilliant by being visible through the pendulous branches of the birch-trees. As the evening drew on, there was up by Glen Dochart and Glen Ogle a yet warmer light shining along the shoulders and peaks of the lonely mountains; later still, the dark Loch Lubnaig, down in its hollow, had a touch of crimson among the purples and greys that crept into the trembling reeds; and still later, the brawling Leny, the widening Teith, the smooth-flowing Allan Water caught here and there, from the overhanging heavens, a glimmer of saffron and rose-red fire. And then, as he left behind him the last of the Highland hills and Stirling rock; and as he got further and further down into the Lowland plains, then ‘the sun

set, and all the ways were overshadowed ; ’ and when he got into Glasgow town, a pervading blue-grey mist had filled the thoroughfares, and the gas-lamps were being lighted.

He did not stay to secure any lodging for himself ; he made straight for the address he had brought with him ; he entered the dusky ‘close’ and ascended the sombre stone stair. He rapped at a door, and was referred to a floor above. Arrived there, he rapped again ; and an old woman appeared, bearing a candle—for now it was practically night.

“I am Allan Henderson,” he said—fearing to question.

“Well, well, indeed,” said the ancient dame, in an accent that sounded friendly in his ear ; “he’ll be glad to see you—wake as he is, poor lad. Many’s was the time he was speaking of you—ay, will you come in now—and not mek mich noise, in case he is sleeping——”

He followed her into the lobby, taking his cap into his hand ; and then, after a moment or two of surveillance, he entered the room she indicated. The eyes of the sick man—which were singularly large, and clear, and lustrous—lighted up with pleasure ; a worn smile of welcome appeared on the white and sunken cheeks. The old woman brought forward a chair ; but Allan went to the bedside, and took his friend’s hand, and remained standing.

“Alec, lad, this is not right—this is not what ought to be,” he said. “What have they been doing to you in this great town ?—we’ll have to get you away to Colonsay, after all——”

“Sit down, old chap,” said the other, in a labouring and husky voice. “And do not burden your soul with lies, Allan ; you never were good at it ; and you never were a good actor either. You must see I’m dying. What about that ? Sit down and let’s have a bit of a friendly confab, as in the old days. I sent ye a silly cry—man, ye should have paid no heed to it——”

“Come, come, now,” Allan interrupted, as he took the chair that was close by. “I’ll not have ye talk in that fashion. I should not wonder if your own instinct was the best guide after all—that ye should be off to have a look at the seas and the clouds about Colonsay——”

“No, no,” MacNeil said, quietly. “The long pantomime’s

coming to an end. The pantomime with its demons and evil chances—its hopes and adventures—its sham and shimmer of love-business even : all coming to an end, and what one is waiting for is the transformation-scene. And after ?” For a second he glanced with a curious look at his friend. But in those strangely-brilliant eyes there was no sort of delirium—nor any trace of agitation or apprehension : what little life was left him was burning away quite clearly, peacefully, complacently. Nay, there was even a frail touch of humour about the pallid lips as he continued : “Mind, it may stand well with me that I have always been respectful about the older deities : I remembered Baudelaire. Heine was wise too : ‘*Mensch, verspötte nicht den Teufel*’—though maybe that’s carrying prudence to an extreme. Anyhow, I’ve always held the great old gods in high respect ; and who knows, when I go below, but they may let me wander through the twilight in a harmless kind of way, looking at the famous ghosts. The heavy-browed Homer for one—if he’s still blind, I could lead him about, man !—and Ulysses, still thinking and dreaming about Sicily—and Achilles—Achilles sure to be weeping and bemoaning himself—would rather be the slave of the meanest hind on earth than the lord of all the phantom-dead. But Nausicaa, now—what do you say, Allan—if one were to come anywhere within sight of her playing with her maidens—well, I think I might have cheek enough to step forward. I don’t think I could help it. ‘Madam,’ I would say to her, as humbly as she might wish, ‘Madam, I am but a poor Scotch student ; and yet if you will permit me, I would like well to stand by the stream, and bring you back the ball, when it chances to fall in.’ Allan, lad, what colour is the asphodel ?”

The schoolmaster, startled out of a reverie, could not say : he muttered something about the bog-asphodel of this country being a small spiked flower, of a yellow colour.

“The asphodel down there must be purple—to suit the twilight,” Alec MacNeil went on—garrulous even in his huskiness, and perhaps too much rejoiced over this visit of his old chum. “Purple—ay—and tall, and lily-like—for the huge Orion to go crashing through the meadows, after the wild beasts. But Allan, tell me this now : is’t not

likely—supposing I were to gather a handful of the asphodels—a whole handful of purple asphodels—do ye not think I would be ready enough to give the lot of them in exchange for just one single gowan—a gowan found away up on Cathkin Braes—in the white light of a May morning? Man, do ye remember how white the mornings were—Sunday mornings mostly—away out by Cathkin and Kilbryde and Eaglesham?—ay, and not to be despised either, the other mornings, when we could take a turn nearer at hand—out by Maryhill or that way—before coming back for Kennedy and his high Oxford sing-song—up Maryhill way—do ye remember the farm-house—and the glimpses of the Argyllshire hills far out in the west—and the fancy that the tops of them were looking across to Jura, and Colonsay, and the Atlantic waves——”

The watchful old grandmother came sidling up behind the schoolmaster’s chair, and said in a whisper—

“Check him, sir—check him; or he’ll be bringing on the cough again.”

Allan held up his hand.

“Well I remember,” he said; “well I remember the white mornings—and Cathkin Braes—and many a silver gowan and yellow buttercup. But ye see, Alce, fine things of that kind are rather exciting to think of—and you’ve done talking enough now——”

“You’re not going—after a mere minute or two!” the sick man exclaimed—pantingly and piteously.

“Nay, I’ll stay with ye for a while—until your grandmother puts me out maybe,” Allan rejoined; “but it’s I must do the talking now, and I’ll tell you all about my small affairs and adventures, since the time I went to Duntroone.”

And this he did—for a good half-hour or more; and in a blithe and lightsome fashion, the better to interest and amuse this friend of old days. What terrible conviction may have lain lurking behind all this assumed cheerfulness was for his own heart alone.

CHAPTER XLV.

ON THE EVE.

NEXT day he went up again to Alec MacNeill's lodgings. Distracted enough he was. On the one hand, he dared not remain longer in Glasgow, for Barbara was to come before the Sheriff the very next morning; on the other hand, it seemed impossible he could tear himself away from this poor wretch, whose eyes, with all their affectation of mirth and content, had a strange, involuntary pleading in them. It was MacNeill himself who sought to set his mind at rest.

"Away home, Allan—away home now," he said. "And take this comfort with ye, that you'll never see the island of Colonsay—however far off on the horizon it may be—just a gray line—a bit of thin transparency—I say you'll never see Colonsay without remembering that you did the last possible kindness to an old friend and a dying man. It was more than I could expect. Railway fares are something to a School Board master—ay, and one that has a young wife and a house to think of; and if you had but said good-bye in a sixpenny telegram, it would have been enough——"

"Be quiet now, Alec," said the other, sharply. "I tell you, I'm desperate vexed I have to leave you again this afternoon; you see, the holidays are coming to an end now, and I must have everything ready—for my classes as well; but then, I can come back—man, I can come baek!—and we've not done yet with the project of taking ye to Colonsay, and trying you with fresh milk and new potatoes—and your native air around you——"

The sick man shook his head, and there was some wan make-believe of a smile on the wasted face.

"You forget, Allan. I've an appointment. I'm due. I must be waiting in the meadows, among the half-black asphodels; and when those Phæacian young creatures come along, I'm ready, I've got my bit speech prepared for the light-footed one at their head: 'Madam, I pray you to forgive my accent; but if I can make myself understood at all, a poor Scotch student would take it as a favour if you

would let him stand down by the stream and stop the ball for you."

"She could not refuse!"

"Oh, well," said he, with a sigh, and he turned away his head, "there may be some strange doors unlocked for me before long. I wish I could send ye word, Allan."

When, on the evening of this same day, Allan Henderson returned to Duntroone, he found the ever-faithful Jess awaiting him on the platform. Jessie's eyes may have been somewhat concerned and apprehensive; but outwardly she was bearing herself with her accustomed quiet.

"What's the news, then, Jessie?" said he, as he stepped from the train.

"Oh, nothing—nothing particular," she answered, "only that all of us are naturally a little anxious—anxious that everything should go right to-morrow. And Mr. McFadyen, he has been as busy and hard at work as Mr. Grant himself—about the witnesses to character; and if the jury will believe Barbara's story—and how can they otherwise?—how can they but believe it?—there will be no trouble at all."

"Could we go in to see her now?" he asked.

"I am thinking it is too late now," Jess said, with some embarrassment. "And, besides, they are maybe not so friendly towards us since Niall Gorach tried to get her away——"

"What nonsense!" the schoolmaster exclaimed, impatiently. "Are they afraid of the silliness of a crack-brained creature like that?"

"Perhaps they are not liking that any one should have been able to get over the wall," Jess suggested.

"Why, then, do they not put spikes on the top?" he demanded.

But it was not Jessie's business to devise means for the better security of the prison. She had already secured her point. She had led him away from his proposal that they should endeavour at this unusual hour to gain access to the cells; and by the time they were leaving the railway premises he had taken his place by her side with unconscious submission. Stubborn and fractious as he was with most, he invariably yielded to Jess—and never knew he was

yielding. It seemed natural to him to do as she wished; for there was always a shrewd and kindly common-sense in what she said—even when she was flouting and merciless. And if Jess was now taking him along with her to press on him some bit of supper, why, he obediently and unheedingly went; though supper was about the last thing in his thoughts.

And yet it was no mere hospitable stratagem that had made Jess solicitous to get the schoolmaster carried away home with her. Earlier in the day she had seen Barbara—in the pale twilight of the cool, clean, quiet, terrible cell; and when she had suggested that perhaps Allan might return from Glasgow in time to obtain admission, Barbara had shrank back from that prospect with something like dread.

“No, no,” she had replied, in a low voice—so that if possible the warder’s wife might not overhear—“I am not wishing to see Allan any more now, before the trial. They have been asking me questions—and I have been thinking—maybe—maybe something will happen to-morrow.”

“Yes, indeed!” cried Jess—with at least a profession of great confidence. “What will happen to-morrow is well-enough known. Your story is quite clear, Barbara—they can do nothing but admit their mistake——”

“But you will keep Allan away,” continued Barbara, as if not hearing. “You’ll keep him away, Jess! And then to-morrow—if something should happen—if they say I took the blonse—or any of the other things—then where is it they will be sending me? Can you tell me, Jessie? It is away from Duntroone? Is it where I would not have to meet Allan again? Would they let me go—without having to face him——”

“I hardly understand what you mean, Barbara,” said Jess, slowly. “Do you mean if—if—the law should say the evidence—was against you? Do you mean a conviction?”

“Yes,” was the answer, uttered in a whisper; and she was hidden and cowering, with lowered head.

“Well, then,” said Jess, recovering herself—and now she spoke boldly—“if the law should find you guilty—justly or unjustly, if the law should find you guilty, Barbara—there

is but the one place for your husband to be, and that is by your side. And that is where Allan Henderson would be, in such a case—that I know well—I know the man that he is—I know where he would be. And why should you distrust him, Barbara? Why should you fear him? Since ever you two came together, he has had eyes for no one in the world but you. He has given you everything—grudged you nothing—the temper and stiffneckedness he many a time shows to others he has never shown to you——”

“But—bnt I had never brought shame on him,” was the response, in half-smothered accents—and her hands were clinched now over her knees. “I am frightened of him, Jess. Jess, Jess, I’m frightened of him!—and you’ll be sure not to let him come here this afternoon; and to-morrow—well, to-morrow, if they are sending me away to jail, where is it?——”

“The jail?—in Glasgow, I suppose,” said Jess, half-stupefied.

“Ah, and then I can get away without seeing him!” she cried, in the same exhausted voice. “And I’ll never come back, Jessie, I’ll never come back again to any of you!—because of the shame.” Tears gathered in the beautiful, out-sweeping black lashes; a sort of infantine piteousness trembled about her mouth; she rocked herself to and fro. “Why was I ever coming to Duntroone? Why did they bring me here, if there was no more home for me at Knockalanish? But I’ll go away now—I’m going away now—and I’ll not come back to bring shame on anyone——” And so she would have continued, in despair and childish self-commiseration, but that Jess Maclean, was by her side, hushing those wild words, and drawing towards her the downcast head with all its splendour of raven hair, now so sadly despoilt and dishevelled; and strangely enough the greatest comfort Jess seemed able to afford was the reiterated assurance that Allan Henderson, whatever time he might arrive from Glasgow, should not be allowed to come near.

And even at this eleventh hour the indefatigable Peter McFadyen had not yet done. While all the rest of the world had come forth from the houses to wander hither and thither by the sea-front—for gossip, and smoking, and to

watch the jet-hulled rowing-boats move about the wide golden plain—the councillor was making his way along one of the smaller back-thoroughfares, until he paused at a certain entrance. Then, in an apparently offhand way, he glanced up and down the street—but indeed the place was practically deserted; and when at length he dived into the entry and made his way up the dark staircase, he met no one at all; not only that, but on reaching the top landing he found the door in front of him open, while a profound silence prevailed. He hesitated. It was like as if he had come on a fool's errand. But the next moment there came from the adjoining room the sound of a voice—a loud, raucous, monotonous voice, with the additional sound of some one pacing up and down.

“Je vous salue, Monsieur,” proceeded the unseen monologist. *“Comment va la santé? Oui, je me porte à merveille, Dieu merci—et toujours prêt à vous servir. Des draps? Parfaitement! Mais, asseyez-vous—asseyez-vous donc, monsieur! J’ai des draps d’Angleterre, d’Allemagne, et de Belgique de toutes les couleurs et de bonne qualité. Voici un drap superfin, et bien tondue. . . . Monsieur, c’est le dernier prix, je vous assure. . . . Mais voyez cette autre pièce, peut-être vous conviendra-t-elle davantage. . . . Non? . . . Voulez-vous que je vous fusse voir des couleurs mélangées?—”*

Mr. McFadyen held back no longer: he knew this was his man. He passed into the lobby, and knocked at the door of the nearest apartment. The French phrases ceased; there was a half-uncertain ‘Come in!’; and therewithal the councillor entered the room.

He found before him a young man of about two-and-twenty, with a shock-head of sandy-yellow hair, high cheekbones, and small, keen blue eyes. The unhappy youth was blushing furiously; his face was about as red as the ‘Manual of Conversation’ he had hastily shut and placed on the table; and he was now reaching over to the bed to pick up his coat, for he had been marching to and fro in his shirt-sleeves, on this warm summer night.

“Mr. McTaggart, I think?” the councillor said, pleasantly.

“Ay, that’s my name,” was the shy answer.

"Mine is McFadyen—I dare say ye know who I am," Peter continued, as he took a chair, and even made bold to possess himself of the small red volume lying on the table. "I imagine I heard ye at the French—it's a fine language—a great leeterary accomplishment——"

"That is hardly what I'm thinking of," the young man said. "It was rather for business purposes——"

"Ah, for business purposes? But surely there's no so many French folk coming through Duntroone way!" rejoined the visitor.

"Oh, no. But—but I was thinking I might get a better chance abroad than staying here—in some new settlement—maybe in South Africa, or East Africa, or the like; and if I could master a little French and German, perhaps a trifle of Portuguese too, it might help me to get on——"

"Admirable—admirable!" cried the councillor, with lofty approval. "That's what I like to hear. That's the true spirit. 'From scenes like these auld Scotia's grandeur springs'—the humble lodging, the energetic young Scotchman laying his plans, with an eye to the Colonies, or further even than that. And what would our Colonies be, but for the pushing young Scotchman, who is up at the front everywhere? Ay, and in the race for Africa, that they talk about, grant a Scotchman his own mother-wit, and give him besides such implements as these—these languages—and where's his equal, where's his rival?" The councillor calmed down a little from this dithyrambic outburst, and began to turn over the pages of the Manual. "And teaching yourself too?" he resumed, encouragingly. "That's well—that's well. But do ye not experience a little difficulty with the pronunciation?"

"I have a Pronouncing Dictionary," the young man made answer—perhaps, with all his bashfulness, beginning to think that Mr. McFadyen the coal-merchant might as well state the object of his visit.

"Not so satisfactory," said Peter, with a critical air. "There's nothing like hearing the folk themselves speak for giving ye the turn of a language. Nothing like travel. Have ye ever been across the water to France?"

"I have never been as far south as London," said the young haberdasher.

“Dod bless me !” exclaimed the councillor. And then he added drily : “But I wouldna have ye begin there. If ye would understand what the folk in the street are saying, ye must try something easier than London. Ostend, now, or Calais, or Paris itself—though in Paris they are rather given to that nipping and pinching of their speech, and the hurry they’re in is just fearful. But it would be practice for ye ; it would be practice ; and I’m sure ye’d like to see the way they deck out the splendid windows o’ their magazines, as they call them ?”

“That I would,” returned the young man, quickly, with his eyes lighting up. Then he added : “But it’s not to be thought of, as far as I am concerned : it’s far away beyond me.”

All this while the town-councillor had been idly turning over leaf after leaf, and glancing at this or that phrase ; but now he slowly shut the book, and placed it on the table, and shoved it away from him.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. McTaggart,” said he ; “I should have told you ere now my chief purpose in calling upon ye. As I understand it, you are one of the principal witnesses, if not the principal witness, in the trial that’s to take place to-morrow.”

The draper’s young man looked uncomfortable—but did not reply.

“No that I’m seeking to interfere wi’ the ends of justice,” McFadyen continued. “God forbid. I would rather promote them. But you are a young man—perhaps not deeply read in human nature—perhaps not accustomed to seeing a young woman in distress—or to comprehend what she may say or do to save herself. Do ye understand me ? It’s a terrible thing to give evidence that may ruin a fellow-creature, and bring disgrace on her family. Are ye so sure of your own observation—of your accuracy of sight and hearing ? I have learned what story it is you have to tell ; most of us have an inkling ; and I suppose to-morrow, when the Sheriff has bade ye take the oath, you are prepared to abide by what you think did really happen——”

“I can but tell the truth !” the young man blurted out—perhaps with some vague sensation of alarm.

“I admire ye for that,” Peter continued, calmly. “But have ye considered now? If ye were to bear false witness—however innocently, however unintentionally—I’m sure it would haunt ye to your dying day: what then would be your satisfaction in striving and holding your own among all the fellows that call themselves the pioneers of civilisation? Whereas—and this is what I want particularly to impress on ye, Mr. McTaggart—and I’m not interfering—I would not interfere—what I want to fix in your mind is that it is so easy not to say things when you’re called as a witness. It’s so easy to be safe, for your own peace of mind, for the satisfaction of your own conscience, in after hours and days. That poor creature of a lass, how could she know what she was doing or saying when she was startled by such a charge being brought against her? You have the impression—an honest impression—yes, yes, doubtless—you have the impression that she offered to pay for the blouse: but are ye sure? are ye going to hamper your conscience with a possibility? And as for the other things you think she said—why, surely in such a moment of desperate flurry and fright, it is all a matter of construction: and your friendly construction—your friendly word—or, better still, what ye might refuse to say—would just be life or death to her, and the saving or the disgrace of her family and friends.”

The young man was staring; and well he might stare. For now, without a further word, Mr. McFadyen took forth from his pocket-book a brand-new Bank of Scotland note for £5, and placed it on the table before him. And then he took out another, and spread that besides its fellow. And then he went to the window, and stood there for a moment or two, looking through the dim panes.

“Mr. McFadyen,” said the poor lad, in an agitated voice, “what do ye mean? I’m bound to tell the truth—I’ll have to take the oath to speak the truth——”

Peter turned round—with a sharp and swift glance. The two bank-notes still lay on the table. He advanced a step, took them up, and restored them to his pocket-book.

“Yes,” said he, with a bland magnanimity. “That is undoubtedly so. But I would just remind ye—for ye are a young man yet—that it is hard to tell what the truth

may have been in a moment of excitement ; and, as I say, a friendly witness can omit this or that, and salve his own conscience as well. Do ye think I am offering a bribe ? Na, na, I'm acquainted with the law ! But—but I was thinking, after I heard ye busy wi' your French conversation, that a young man like you would profit just beyond measure by a week or two's travelling abroad—your next holidays, I mean ; and I would like to help you. Ay," concluded the wily councillor, as he rose to his feet, "and I would add this : that whatever ye happened to see lying on the table remains in my pocket-book, for the present ; but—but without prejudice, as the lawyers say—it might come out and lie on the table again. Do ye understand me ? There's no bribery attempted or thought of—God forbid ; but a friendly witness is a friendly witness ; and a friendly witness is one that keeps a happy conscience thereafter in his own body. Do ye understand me ?—and I'll just leave ye to think over what I've said."

And therewith the unscrupulous McFadyen, quite pleased with himself and his astuteness and diplomacy, got him out of the silent and empty house ; and presently was down again on the busier esplanade—where the moving groups of people were almost ebony-black against the russet and golden after-glow that filled both sea and sky.

CHAPTER XLVI.

ARRAIGNED.

"THE Court !" called out the Crier ; a sudden hush fell over the scattered groups of folk in the red pine pews ; from the opened door the Sheriff, in wig and gown, advanced to his place on the bench ; the one or two lawyers at the central table rose and bowed, and the salutation was returned ; then the business of the day began. It was all so commonplace, familiar, routine-like. Those people—the spectators—had been idly talking to each other about their ordinary affairs ; or glancing out of the tall window towards

the blue mountains of Mull ; or with a listless curiosity scanning some new-comer. They seemed little to comprehend what issues were involved—what all this meant to the solitary figure in the dock, alone with her own dreadful fears, perhaps even with her despair.

But there was at least one person present who was nervously and excitedly alive to all that was going on ; and that was the little widow, who was seated by her daughter's side, with her hand firmly gripping Jessie's arm. She said nothing while the Sheriff-clerk, in the well of the court, was reading aloud the charge against the accused ; she only ejaculated, to herself, " Poor lass ! " when the Judge formally asked Barbara if she adhered to her previously-tendered plea of " Not Guilty " ; but when the Clerk proceeded to impanel the jury, her agitation could hardly be kept within control.

" See, see ! " she said, in a hurried undertone, to Jess. " There's Johnnie Wilson—Johnnie !—that I mind coming to Duntroone a long-legged lad with scarce a pair of shoes to his feet. Ay, and many's the good turn your father was doing him ; do you think Johnnie Wilson would be wishing to harm us now ? And McKendrick, Jess—d'ye see McKendrick the boatbuilder yonder—ah, that's a good man—just a perfect man—an elder in Queen Street Free Kirk ; and it's no possible he would lift a finger against an orphan ! It's just no possible ! And did you think Barbara made it quite clear to them that she was pleading ' Not Guilty ? '—I could hardly hear her myself—and they're in such a hurry from one thing to another that a body is just driven daft-like. See, Jess, there's McLaughlin the bookseller !—a wise, kindly lad—as kindly a lad as ever lived !—if I had known he was to be on the jury, I would have slippit round one of these past evenings to see him and his mother. And do ye not think ye could make a bit signal to him, and let him see we are here, and looking to him for help ? There could be no harm in that, lass—no harm at all——"

" Sh ! mother ! " said Jess, under her breath.

For now the Procurator Fiscal, rising from his place at the table, intimated to the Judge that he would proceed to lead evidence ; and the first witness summoned by the Crier was Alexander McLennan. Mr. McLennan the draper—a

small, pale, black-a-vised, shy-looking man—stepped along and entered the witness-box. The little widow was regarding him with eyes that burned.

“Ah, the ape!—ah, the serpent!” she muttered, through her clenched teeth—and she was all trembling with passion. “To bring such a story against one of my girls! If my poor man was alive—if my man was alive to look after us—McLennan would not be standing there with his brazen face——”

And yet McLennan the draper—when the oath had been administered to him by the Sheriff, and when the Fiscal, following the witness’s precognition which he held in his hand, set about eliciting his story—McLennan did not appear to be actuated by any animosity. The tale he had to tell was simple enough. In answer to the Fiscal’s questions, he said he had been led to suspect the accused because of the disappearance of certain articles after she had been visiting his shop; and he had resolved to watch, and had ordered his assistants to do the like. On the day in question, the accused entering the shop, he had directed the silk tartan blouse now produced—produced and lying on the table for the jury to see—to be placed on the counter. She had on one or two previous visits examined the blouse, inquired the price, and so forth. On this last occasion she had made some small and unimportant purchases, and was about to leave the shop again, when witness, who had been standing behind a rack used for the hanging and displaying of shawls, stepped forward and intercepted her. He saw that the blouse was gone; he assumed that she had taken it; and asked her if she had received a bill for it. The prisoner was greatly disconcerted; said she had not taken the blouse; at the same moment it appeared to fall from underneath her half-open jacket. She then made conflicting statements; first, that she meant to pay for it on her return; again, that it had fallen on the floor by accident; again, that she had been commissioned to buy it for her cousin, and would bring the money presently; at last she said she would give them the price of the blouse twice over if they would let her go. Then he sent for a policeman.

“Ay, ay,” said the widow, breathing hard, “but it is not

a policeman you would want, if God was to strike you dead for your lies !”

The Fiscal sate down, and the long, thin, sandy-haired Mr. Grant got up, leisurely twisting his watch-chain between finger and thumb. Addressing the witness, he said he wished to put a few questions. Had he, McLennan, on any previous occasion observed the prisoner abstract any article from his shop ! No ? Then how came he to fix his suspicions on her out of all his customers ? Did he do so just at random ? Being annoyed over these losses, was he determined to secure a scapegoat, no matter whom ? And being resolved to convict somebody, he was not above laying a snare ? And having prepared his trap, he was fully anticipating that his designed victim would fall into it ? He was behind a screen of shawls, and perhaps could not see very well ; but, expecting a certain thing to happen, he did not need the evidence of his eyes : he jumped to the conclusion that it had happened ?

“ Ah, do ye hear ?—do ye hear, Allan ? ” exclaimed the impulsive and warm-hearted little widow, as she leaned over and touched the schoolmaster on the arm—the schoolmaster, whose absorbed and rapt attention seemed to be following every turn and twist of the desultory narrative.

The cross-examination continued. Was he, McLennan, ready to swear that he actually saw the blouse in the possession of the accused ? No ? It only appeared to fall from her when he stepped forward ? At all events it would be safe to say that, when he emerged from his hiding-place and advanced to the accused, the first he saw of the blouse was either that it was falling, or had fallen to the floor in front of him ? But there were different ways and means by which it might have come there ? He was doubtless familiar with the fact that women’s dress in the present day was frequently adorned with prehensile tags and gewgaws well calculated to sweep off any loose article lying about ? As to the so-called confession of the prisoner, was he prepared to swear that these were the exact and literal words she had used ? Was his memory so prodigiously accurate ? He had not jotted down any memorandum of these contradictory sentences ? Was he himself somewhat perturbed by this unusual incident ? As these quiet, insidious, encouraging

little questions came to him one after the other, the shy-looking black-a-vised draper became more and more visibly discomposd—and Mrs. Maclean more and more triumphant. It is true, the re-examination by the Fiscal in a measure restored Mr. McLennan's equanimity ; and he stepped out from the box and passed along to the witnesses' room happily unconscious of the vengeful and bitter regard with which the widow followed him.

The next witness—young McTaggart the shopman—was clearly from the very outset in a condition of abject fright. He entered the box apprehensively ; his uplifted right hand, when the Sheriff administered the oath, was tremulous ; his replies to the questions of the Fiscal were mumbled and almost inaudible. And it is to be presumed that no one in all the Court-house now listened more keenly than Peter McFadyen ; here was his man ; and little did the lawyers biting the end of their quills know of the secret influences that had been brought to bear to outwit them. At first, indeed, the shock-headed youth's narrative of what had happened at the counter was mainly a corroboration of his employer's statements.

"Ay, ay—yes, yes," muttered the widow, in spite of all her daughter's persuasive repression, "a fine story, my young lad!—and if your master is a liar, why should not you be too? But wait till Grant gets at ye! Ay, it's some combing of your besom-hair that's wanted for you, my fine fellow—and Grant will give it ye directly!"

But when Mr. Grant came to cross-examine the unhappy young man, he found him an almost too easy prey. The bewildered youth was ready to admit anything. His most passionate hope of being able to practise French conversation in the streets and omnibuses of Paris could not have been more effectual than his pathetic desire to propitiate this ruthless questioner. He was not playing into the hands of the defence through any base longing for McFadyen's £10 ; he was merely frightened out of his wits on finding himself in a public pillory ; and willing to assent to every one of the lawyer's suggestions, so that he might the sooner escape. Accordingly, he acknowledged that it was with some reluctance he had consented to set a trap by means of which this young woman might be tempted into

the commission of a crime. He agreed that it was impossible he could have kept the snare under continuous supervision ; for he was fetching down things from the shelves for the accused to examine ; again and again he must have turned his back. Moreover, he owned that he had not placed any weight or other article on the blouse, after laying it on the counter : there was nothing to hinder its being swept off by some slight accident. Again, he was on the inside of the counter : how, then, could he see in what manner the blouse came to reach the floor, on the outside ? As to the conflicting statements alleged to have been made by the prisoner, was he prepared to swear to precise words and expressions used in a moment of extreme agitation ? But at this point the shock-headed youth began to develop a confusion and a grasping acquiescence that were not only extremely welcome to the lawyer, but that also convinced Mr. McFadyen he would sooner or later, and in some cryptic fashion, have to pay over £10. The young man, his complexion pale, his forehead clammy, his eyes dilated and nervous—appeared to be in some kind of hypnotic trance : he remembered, or did not remember, just as this long, thin, sandy-haired agent thought fit to suggest ; he clung desperately to the formula ‘the best of his belief.’ Nor did re-examination restore him to himself ; white-faced, protuberant-eyed, he seemed to reel away from the box, as it were ; and doubtless began to breathe again only when he found that the gaze of the crowd was no longer upon him.

And all this while Jess Maclean, when she dared, had been stealing an occasional and covert glance at the school-master, fearing that he had already divined the truth. Well she knew that the fencing of lawyers and the heckling of witnesses would have but little concern for him ; the progress of the trial would be for him no mere game of skill, that one could watch and study, with a calculation of the chances of acquittal ; the sole and terrible question for him was whether the poor wretch alone there in the dock had really done this thing, bringing upon herself all its tragic and illimitable consequences. And yet Jess, accustomed as she was to read his features, was now completely baffled. His face was immobile and impassive—sombre a

little, perhaps—and unmistakably oblivious of the people around. Even the proceedings in court, as they went on, seemed to claim from him but a forced and mechanical sort of attention. There were further witnesses to be examined and re-examined; articles found in the house of the accused, and alleged to have been stolen—the red sunshade conspicuous amongst them—were produced and identified; there was evidence of previous good character; and the like. But throughout all this Allan Henderson remained distraught and absent-minded. Was he already convinced? Once or twice his eyes rested on the solitary figure in the dock; but little was to be seen of the hapless Barbara; she was facing the Sheriff—her head downcast, her figure drawn together as though she were cowering and hiding herself.

Then the Fiscal got up and addressed the Court for the prosecution—insisting that this was a particularly bad case: not a sudden yielding to temptation, but part of a planned and systematic purloining, for which no excuse or palliation had been offered. Next came Grant the solicitor with his reply for the defence—rather dwelling on the youth of the prisoner, her position as an almost newly-married wife, and the extreme probability that she had been terrified into making damaging admissions when this dreadful charge had been brought against her. Finally the Sheriff summed-up, keeping mainly to the legal aspects of the case. And then fifteen good men and true filed out of the two pine benches, and rather sheepishly—for they were unaccustomed to this prominence and publicity—crossed the hall, and betook themselves to the jury-room.

“Ah, the bonny lads!—the bonny lads!” exclaimed Mrs. Maclean, in an eager and tremulous whisper—indeed, she was shaking like a leaf—“they will put her right!—they will quit my lass!—after all the stories and lies!”

Allan Henderson had not turned to say a word to any of the friends or relatives near him; and now, in this period of waiting, his eyes were bent on the floor. Even Jess did not dare to approach him with any little whisper of comfort or hope. The jury were absent for only a few minutes—not over ten.

Then they came back; and their Chancellor remained

standing. The Sheriff, in a formal kind of way, asked if they had come to a decision.

"We find the accused guilty of the charge as libelled," said the Chancellor—self-conscious and red of face.

For just one second the Sheriff glanced towards them : was there to be no recommendation to mercy ? There was none. The Fiscal moved the Court to pronounce sentence ; the Clerk at the table pulled his papers towards him ; the Sheriff, after a few observations uttered in the same dispassionate tones, announced that the sentence of the Court was six months' imprisonment.

"My lord !—my lord ! she's an orphan lass !" cried out the widow, as she sank forward half-fainting, till Jess caught her in her arms ; and at this moment the prisoner—her head still averted, her figure apparently lifeless—was led away by the two policemen, disappearing through the door leading to the exercise-yard and the cells.

And now some were for going home ; and others lingered to talk ; but the schoolmaster found himself alone, at the foot of the wide stairs, his face confronting the white daylight. There was a phrase he had often used recurring now to his brain in some wild, bewildering fashion—'The poor *Naturkind* ! The poor *Naturkind* that she has always been !' ; and on his features there was no stern reprehension at all ; nay, as he left the building, his eyes were so swimming wet that he could hardly see his way. Jess, with her heart full of yearning pity, nevertheless had not the courage to follow him. She looked after him—as he went aimlessly along by the harbour, in the direction of the Gallows Hill.

"Mother," said she, in a low voice, though he was now far out of hearing, "if—if you can get Allan to stay in our house to-night—I will go with Barbara wherever they are taking her."

CHAPTER XLVII.

DAY AND NIGHT.

BUT that was mad and wild counsel—uttered in a moment of half-reckless despair. For Jess Maclean knew this man ; not for nothing had she watched and studied him—him and all his imperfections, his perversities, his scornful endurance of ills, his impatient contempt of meaner natures ; and she herself had foretold where, in such a crisis as had now arrived, Allan Henderson would be found. ‘There is but the one place for your husband to be,’ she had said to Barbara, ‘and that is by your side.’ And when she learned from the police-officials that the prisoner was to be taken through to Glasgow on this same afternoon, she went along at the appointed hour to the railway-station, knowing well whom she should find waiting there.

He was on the platform, alone, and unnoticed among the scattered crowd of folk bidding good-bye to their friends. And fortunate it was that these people were so busily occupied ; for at this moment Barbara—Barbara, all broken-down in appearance, listless, hopeless, the beautiful eyes tired and worn with excess of weeping, and now only haunted with a sort of cowering and shuddering horror of these groups of strangers—Barbara came along in charge of a constable, the two of them attracting far less attention than might have been expected. The officer opened the door of a third-class compartment ; Barbara entered, and sank into a seat ; while Jess Maclean and Allan instinctively moved up, as if to prevent the approach of any curious person. For a second or two no one spoke ; but all the same Jess made bold to put her hand into the carriage, and with that hand she held Barbara’s hand ; the law could not—or, at least, did not—forbid this form of communication. And then Barbara said, with a timid look towards the constable—

“Jess, if you would—if you would ask this gentleman—maybe he would let you come in beside me——”

The gentleman—who was not a gentleman at all—nor even an inspector—nor yet a sergeant—but just a

decent and simple lad from Mull, who did not quite appear to relish these duties that had devolved upon him—the ingenuous-looking constable took no notice of this hint. And meanwhile Jess had to interpose with an explanation.

“I cannot go to Glasgow with you, Barbara,” said she. “I was ready and willing—indeed, yes; but my mother is taken very ill; and I dare not leave her for so long. But Allan is going with you, Barbara. Who else? Who else would you be wishing to have with you—who else could protect you as well?”

A strange look of dread or doom seemed to settle on the girl’s face; she did not venture a single half-frightened glance towards her husband; when she heard that Jess was not going with her, she appeared to care for nothing after that; a kind of blankness of despair took possession of her. And Jess could not part with her in this mood.

“Barbara,” said she, with a fine affectation of confidence and good-humour, though her lips were inclined to be tremulous despite all she could do, “you must be remembering this—that when you come back to us, you will be just the same as the rest of us. The law has decided against you; and it may be right, or it may be wrong; but anyway, when you have done what they require of you, then you are free, you are quits; you are just like every one else. And you will let me know how often I can write to you; and you will write to us as often as you can. And you will tell us when we are to come for you—to bring you back——”

Barbara shook her head—without a word.

“Take your seats, please,” called the guard; and as he came up, Allan Henderson stepped forward, and without asking permission of anyone, entered the carriage, passed to the further end, and sate down by the window. Then the door was shut; the whistles sounded; and the train began to creep out of the station. Jess walked a few farewell yards along the platform; it was she who was crying and sobbing now—in spite of herself; Barbara seemed lost in a misery and gloom that had arrived almost at indifference. Finally, Jess, having watched the carriage-window till the very last moment, turned and took her way slowly home; while the train thundered on towards the south.

And now

‘Sad and silent was the night
That was atween thir twae’;

for although no compact had been entered into by which Allan had gained admission into this compartment, there was some tacit kind of feeling that in the presence of the constable these two must needs regard each other as strangers. Perhaps Barbara was so far glad and relieved; perhaps she had some secret dread of indignation and reproach; though there was little of either in Allan Henderson’s heart. Nay, he was full of sympathy and commiseration for ‘the poor *Naturkind*’ and her downcast condition; it may be that he understood her tragic case far more clearly than she did herself; more clearly than she did, without doubt, he perceived the web of circumstances by which she had been surrounded and brought to ruin. Resentment—reprobation—as if he had been the wronged person—was indeed far away from his mind. He remained silent, it is true; but he was tremblingly sensitive to each slight motion of her costume, to each laboured and weary sigh, to each shifting from one shoulder to the other, as if she were ill and ill at ease. He pitied her even for her dress; for Barbara had always liked something of ornament and show; but now it was only too evident that in the abandonment of her grief and terror she had had no thought for any such trivialities. Perhaps Jess might have looked after her, had there been the opportunity. The splendid folds of her raven-black hair had been put back in some rude kind of fashion; but now there were none of the coquettish tangles and twirls she had been fond of displaying about her ears. She wore no gloves, nor any dainty white cuffs about her wrists, nor any slip of silk tartan ribbon round her throat—this poor *Naturkind*, who had been so severely buffeted and shipwrecked by the wild storms of human chance.

As the evening wore on, and they were up among the lonely mountains beyond Crainlarich, a somewhat chill wind blew in and through the compartment; and Barbara was seated with her face to the engine. Allan rose, stepped across, and pulled up the window, so as to afford her shelter

"Thank you," she said, in a low voice—without raising her eyes.

Again, when they got down to Stirling station, he sought out the refreshment-room, had a couple of paper bags filled with sweet biscuits and the like, and when he returned he mutely tendered them to her. She took them, with another word of thanks; though not even now did she dare to raise her eyes to his. And thus they resumed their journey to Glasgow, and to the great and sombre building that stands by the river.

But in the meantime Barbara had not failed to notice that when the constable happened to recognise an acquaintance at any of the stations along the line, the few words that passed between them were usually in Gaelic; and accordingly, when she at length ventured to address a hesitating question or two to him, on their drawing near to Glasgow, it was in that tongue she spoke, so as perhaps to win a little favour and friendliness. And it was still in Gaelic that she said—in a diffident undertone that Allan could not well overhear—

"My husband has come a long way. Will you be giving me a moment that I can say good-bye to him?"

"Do you mean at the station?" responded the constable.

"It is wherever you please, sir," said Barbara, humbly. "I am not wishing for anything that is not permitted—but—but my husband, he has come a long way."

"Oh, very well," said the good-natured young officer. "When we get to the station, I will try to leave you by yourselves for a minute, just where you are, but no more than a minute, for there will be a cab to take you on to the Jail."

And he was as good as his word. When the train had passed the ticket-platform, had slowed in to the terminus, and finally come to a standstill, the constable opened the door, stepped out, and remained there with his back to the carriage. At the same moment Allan rose to his feet; and Barbara rose also; but she did not look up to see the extraordinary compassion that dwelt in his eyes; she rather stood before him as a culprit and penitent, ready to receive whatever scorn and chastisement of words he chose to heap upon her. And yet—no matter what might be his indig-

nation and contumely—she had so many things she longed to say, and all of them struggling for utterance! Her chest heaved; she seemed to breathe with difficulty; her hands, down by her side, were firmly clenched. She was waiting. Why did he not strike?

“Poor lass! Poor lass!” said he; and the mere tone of his voice, so unexpected, so unmistakable in its true ring of solicitude and tenderness, caused her whole frame to tremble. “I suppose I can go no further with you now——”

“Allan, Allan,” she burst out into a sort of wild way, “I am not hoping that you will ever forgive me for what I have done! Oh, no!—no, no!—I do not expect it—I have brought nothing but harm to you—I have been a bad wife to you—I have brought nothing but harm and shame. But now—now you will go away back to your home; and you will soon forget me; and I will never seek to see Duntroone any more—never, never—I have done enough harm—I will never see you or any of them any more—it is all that I can do now——”

“Barbara!” said he, gently and bravely. “You are talking foolishness. Do you remember the last words that Jessie spoke to you on the platform?—she said that when you came back to us you would be just as one of ourselves—quit and free of everything that had gone by—and all of us only anxious that it should be forgotten——”

“Ah, no, no!” she broke in upon him, quite incoherently. “That is all away. I will never trouble you any more—I have done too much harm. And there’s other things I would say—but—but only a moment now; and it’s my thanks to you for your goodness to me, and that you have not cursed at me, as many a one would have done. Indeed, indeed you have been kind to me; and I was not deserving it; there was many things happening that you did not know about; and there was never any hard word from you. And now you will go away to your home—and Jessie will look after the house for you—she was always a better friend to you than I was——”

The constable turned and looked into the compartment: the cab was waiting at the platform.

“My poor lass,” said the schoolmaster, trying to smooth back her disordered hair into some semblance of its former

neatness, "you will soon begin to think of the days of your coming back to us——"

"Ah, never, never," she cried, in panting accents ; "it is the one thing I can do, never to trouble you any more—neither you nor any of them—I have brought too much harm and shame——"

The young constable, irresolute, anxious, a little shame-faced, opened the door wide.

"Will you be coming now, mem ?" said he.

By this time most of the travellers had left the platform ; when those two crossed to the vehicle that was in attendance, there was hardly anyone about to witness their last and mute farewell. And then Barbara was driven away ; and the schoolmaster, not knowing what his next step should be, found himself a solitary stranger in this great and friendless town.

Yet not quite friendless either. More than once, during all the recent whirl of experiences and emotions, a wandering thought or two had involuntarily fled away towards the sick-chamber of Alec MacNeil ; and now, in this strange succeeding calm and isolation, it was but natural he should wish to look once again on the face of his old comrade. Not that he proposed to carry the tale of his own wounds and sorrows to the invalid's room ; these were for his private hours of reverie and renunciation ; but there would be some kind of solace in merely sitting by the side of his friend ; it was moreover a duty he owed—if any companionship of his could lighten a weary half-hour. And so, in a dull and mechanical fashion, he betook himself away through the wet and gas-lit streets ; and eventually reached the building in Garsecube Road at the top of which MacNeil had his poor lodging.

It was now late ; and, as he ascended to the highest storey, he passed noiselessly up the staircase, lest the sick man should have already got to sleep. Not a sound was audible anywhere. With the same cautious footsteps he arrived at the landing, which was quite dark ; and then he stealthily approached the door, and listened. No—not a sound. Nevertheless, he lingered ; for MacNeil might be reading ; and at any minute he might put down the book, and call to the attendant grandmother. Nay, the longer

Allan Henderson tarried here in the darkness, the more did he seem to crave for a friendly word and glance, if only as a reminiscence of the far-bygone, half-happy student-times. He would bring with him no useless tidings of his own broken and shattered life. Rather his talk would be—if his old companion were still awake, and inclined to hear—his talk would be of cheerful things—of Cathkin Braes, and May mornings, of eager and joyous rambles by Bothwell Banks, and Cadzow, and Stonebyres. They would recall the early woods—the resonant ‘*Gauldeamus*’ of the tramping chorus—the breakfast in the remote little wayside public-house. These were the proper pictures for any poor tired soul to fall asleep with, so that a scent of hawthorn-bushes and a murmur of distant waterfalls should come stealing through the vagrant dreams of the night.

Of a sudden he was startled by a low moaning ; hushed and faint it was ; and yet the silence around was so intense that he could not be mistaken. It was the old grandmother’s voice ; it was a kind of plaintive wail she uttered ; ‘ och-hon !—och-hon !—och-hon ! ’ repeated in despairing tones ; and then came silence again. He knew not what was happening, or what had happened, within ; but he dared not go away. He tapped lightly with the back of his hand. There was no answer. He rapped a second time, and waited. Presently the door was opened, and the old grandmother peered out into the gloom.

“ Ah, yes,” she said, with a heavy sigh, when she had discovered who her visitor was, “ you were the last that he was speaking of, the poor lad !—and the last of his friends that came to see him.” She retreated a little space, as if inviting him to enter. “ There is but a sorrowful welcome in the house now ; but maybe you would like to look on all that is left of my poor boy. Yes, he was speaking of you to the end—and there are some books for you—and a fishing-rod—to the very end he was speaking of you——”

The schoolmaster removed his cap, and passed in.

“ When did it happen ? ” he said—in a needless whisper.

“ This morning,” she made answer, “ just as the day was coming in at the window.”

Then she led him to the small, dimly-lit room where the

dead man lay, peaceful enough now after the long struggle with his insidious and merciless enemy.

"And is there no one in the house with you?" he asked of her, in a little while.

"None. But the neighbours have been very kind."

"Grandmother," said he, "I will stay a while with you, if you will let me; I will stay with you, until you tell me to go. I am rather lonely myself to-night. And I would like to hear what he was thinking of, what he was talking of, when it came near to the last."

So she softly shut the door behind them, and preceded him into the kitchen, where the turned-up gas was burning a little more cheerfully. She took her chair near the fire-place; she put on her spectacles again; and made as though she would have resumed her sewing, but that the interest of the pathetic monologue she now entered upon, interrupted as it was by many a covert fit of crying, caused her to desist. For these were not merely deathbed reminiscences that led her garrulity to wander on through the dead hours of the night. This grandson of hers had been during his too brief life her best-beloved; and she had treasured up a minute recollection of all the wonderful things that had happened to him—his childish exploits—his leaving Colonsay—his successes at school and college—the kindness of the manufacturer in whose warehouse he had secured a situation as book-keeper. It was with pride as well as affection that she rambled on; this was a marvellous career, she seemed to say, that had been so pitilessly cut short; mournful as the disconnected narrative was, it had its brighter glimpses; and perhaps for an occasional minute or two Allan forgot to think of the dark and ominous building away down at the other end of the city, near to the dim river. Nay, it was something to have the companionship of this poor old creature, even here in the silent house of death. And she, too, appeared to be grateful to him for remaining with her—as she talked on, in this hushed fashion, broken by many sobs and piteous ejaculations.

At last he rose to go, after having made patient inquiries as to her circumstances, her plans, and her remaining relatives. When he got outside, he found that the world had undergone transfiguration; the new dawn was abroad,

pale over the moving canopy of smoke in the east ; the grey houses near him were waking out of their dream. At such an hour he did not care to go in search of a lodging ; moreover, the rain of the night had ceased ; soon the morning would be shining fair and wide and clear. And so—perhaps with some vague and restless desire to escape from the black shadows that appeared to be encompassing him—he struck away out into the country : everywhere the white daylight was now beginning to tell.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

PAULINE.

HE was returning, heart-sick and tired and hopeless, from his long and fortuitous ramble, and he was coming in by way of the Botanic Gardens, when he chanced to perceive, leaving a house on the other side of the thoroughfare, a well-known and easily-recognised figure. It was Professor Menzies. And he would fain have slunk by unnoticed ; he was in no humour for talking to anyone ; still less did he wish to be cross-examined about what had recently happened to him or his. But the next minute he heard himself called by name ; he became aware of overtaking strides ; and presently, the Professor—a big, bulky, fresh-complexioned, enpeptic-looking man—had him by the shoulder.

“What—what’s this ?” he exclaimed, in a hale and hearty voice. “Not running away, are you ? Why, it was only yesterday I was thinking of you, and wondering how you were getting on in Duntroone. And what’s brought you to Glasgow ? I’m going as far as Garnet Hill—I’ll walk with you.”

And so Allan—not unmindful of many kindnesses and confidences—was constrained to tell his story, down even to the sombre experiences of the day before.

“A terrible bad business,” said the Professor, after a moment or two. “Terrible—terrible. And what are your plans now ? Are you going back to Duntroone ?”

"As soon as I get poor MacNeil buried."

"Your return home will not be a very cheerful thing," was the next vague suggestion.

"I shall have plenty to do," Allan responded, "when the school opens; and there will be my own classes in the evening."

The two walked on for some little time in silence.

"How I came to be thinking of you yesterday was this," the Professor said, at length. "I was thinking you knew little of the mischief you had done by refusing the offer of the Cairds—you remember?"

"Remember? Yes, indeed! And many's the time I've thought that I never half expressed my thanks to you."

"You appeared unwilling to give up your pupils. But I could have provided you with a substitute—I imagine so; and you may be pretty certain that the Cairds of Carsehill would not have let you suffer in pocket through the transaction. Well, what happens through your refusal? The lad, whimsical as he may be, was half-inclined to go; he had heard something about you; and after all, he is amenable enough—though those tearing, hunting, horse-racing uncles of his seem to look on him as a sort of changeling. You refuse—and what is the result? He returns to his idling, his verse-making, his newspaper-scribbling; spends most of his time at the Nike-apteros Club—among artists, journalists, and the like; and at last—this is the climax—falls into love with an actress—some member of a strolling company—and declares his intention of marrying her. What do you think of that now?"

"If he was of the mind and temperament to fall in love with an actress," rejoined the schoolmaster, "he would have done that as readily in any town of Austria or Italy as in any city or town of Scotland."

"Well, no—not necessarily. For there is a certain barrier in language. And he knows a good deal more of Greek and Latin than he does of German or Italian."

"There is another language," Allan said.

"Yes. There may be, when two combustible souls happen to catch fire at once. But that doesn't occur often, does it? However, I've shown you how we stand at present; and what are the tearing, swearing, blustering

iron-masters of Carsehill to make of it ? He is so sweetly reasonable through it all ! They talk of the disgrace of the family ; while he is polishing pretty verses about her brown ringlets."

"Is she a respectable girl ?"

"Apparently she is. At least they can't find out anything to the contrary ; and if they did, or fancied they did, no doubt he would only smile at them in disdain. For, as I say, the scamp is not unreasonable, even in the midst of his folly. He is open to argument. In fact, there has been some revival of that same project that he should go abroad for a considerable time—with the chance of all this blowing over—with several chances indeed ; and I am told he is not afraid to put the young lady's constancy, and his own, to the test. If he were challenged, he would probably consent ; but the old difficulty remains—how to secure a proper companion for him. He is capricious in his fancies. The ordinary young men of his own age, and all their pursuits, he regards with detestation. He might have done well at college, for the rascal is clever ; but he is without sufficient aim—too erratic for any steady work—would rather put a handful of rhymes in his pocket, walk away out into the country, sit down by the wayside, and tinker at them. Hardly the kind of fellow to attack a translation of the *Nibelungenlied*, eh ?—by the bye, I should have asked how you were getting on."

"I have been thinking of other things of late," said the schoolmaster.

The big, stalwart, friendly Professor suddenly halted—as if the better to arrest attention.

"Look here, Henderson," said he. "The Cairds have come to me several times about this affair—they know I can talk to the youth with some chance of being listened to, whereas they belong to a different world altogether. Now, suppose this former scheme were to be revived. I don't at all like the idea of your going away back home to your ordinary life, in the present circumstances. You want a complete change, of scene and occupation ; you want to forget a little—in order to recover your mental tone. Very well. Assuming that the uncles and young Caird could come to some agreement, would you be willing to go with

him on his period of probation—that is, if you and he found that you got on well together? It would mean the giving up of your place in the school; and also getting a substitute to take your classes; but the Carsehill squires would be liberal in such a case; and the young fellow, he is really good-natured, he would see it was made worth your while. A couple of year's absence from England——”

“I should have to be back in this town six months from now,” said Allan, simply.

The Professor coloured slightly: he understood.

“But even six months,” said he, as they resumed their walk, “is a long time; and many things happen in it; six months might find Caird junior restored to his sane and sober senses; and in any case six months' absence from England would be a wholesome thing for you. Now I don't want you to make any definite promise; but come and see this young fellow—see what you think of him. I may be too busy to hunt him up to-day; but in that case I will write to him; and to-morrow you and I could call on him in the afternoon. Is it a bargain? I might run across some of his people meanwhile—who knows? Turn it over in your mind now—and don't be in a hurry; and if you think well of the scheme, send me a note saying where I shall find you to-morrow afternoon at four.”

Allan did not refuse—could not think of refusing: clearly enough he recognised all the kindliness, the goodwill, and thoughtfulness that underlay this apparently rough-and-ready proposal. And accordingly, on the next afternoon, Professor Menzies and his protégé found themselves being shown into a suite of rooms on the first floor of a house in Sauchiehall Street. They were smartly-furnished rooms; but the decoration was not as the decoration of many young men's apartments. There were no fencing-foils, masks, or dumb-bells, with hunting and yachting trophies, and coloured lithographs representing famous exploits on Epsom Downs; a gentler tone prevailed; around the walls, and in one or two small cabinets, and on the mantel-shelves, were displayed Hispano-Moresque dishes, Tanagra figures, squares of Italian sixteenth-century embroidery framed and glazed, bronze statuettes, a number of landscapes chiefly of the Scotch school, and a series of

prints from the *Liber Studiorum*. The owner of these various possessions now entered—a young lad of nineteen or twenty, rather under middle height, and distinctly lame in one leg; the face and head intelligent and interesting, the complexion pale, the mouth finely-formed, the eyes large, clear, and amiable. His manners, too, were winning; he bade his visitors welcome with an offhand simplicity; and again and again he regarded Allan with a scrutinising glance that seemed frankly to say ‘So, it is you they want me to go travelling with, for six months, or a year, or two years?’ On the other hand the schoolmaster—as he subsequently wrote to Jess—formed from the very first a liking for this lame lad. He was a trifle shy, perhaps, and yet somehow defiant in his shyness. He appeared to treat his horse-racing uncles with more than a suspicion of gentle ridicule. He even ventured upon a little banter with regard to the Professor, which was taken in good part. And he was especially courteous and civil to his stranger-guest; and said some very pretty things about the West Highlands and the folk living there.

But it had been the design of Professor Menzies to leave these two to themselves; and so, pleading an engagement, he left; while young Caird, having persuaded Allan to remain, proceeded to talk about himself, and his circumstances, and this projected trip, with the most engaging, and useful, candour. He was not averse from going, he said, if it would pacify his relatives; though their ideas, he added with a smile, as to what would accrue from this long absence, were purely chimerical. And if, on his side, Mr. Henderson could be induced to join, what countries in Europe would he chiefly wish to visit?

At this Allan’s eyes flashed up in eager flame.

“There is the one place—the one place in all the world—Athens!”

And then he shrank back upon himself, as it were, half in shame.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, quite humbly. I was bewildered for a moment. The mere mention of Athens shows me that it is not for me to go with you on such a journey as you are thinking of. No, no. You must have somebody with you far less ignorant than I am. What could

I tell you at Athens, at Nauplia, at Acro-Corinth? You must have somebody skilled and learned. They are the most interesting places in the world; and what could a country schoolmaster tell you?"

The young lad had been looking at him—not with disfavour.

"I don't want anybody to tell me anything," said he. "I should like to see the places, no doubt; but I am not anxious to be lectured. Not in the least. If I have to do penance—or go on probation—if that is their insane idea—it has got to be made easy. The peas must be boiled. Do you know any modern Greek?"

"Not to speak it, anyway."

"Well, we can be cheated in some other language," continued the young man, placidly. "I want some Rhodian plates; and I am told there are a few to be picked up in Athens now and again." He had limped over to the mantel-shelves, apparently to have another loving look at the row of splendid red-lustre dishes; but presently he returned, with a little brown paper-covered book—an acting-edition—in his hand. "By the way," he said, "have you ever seen 'The Lady of Lyons'?"

"No; but I have read the play."

"And what did you think of it?"

"Trash, it seemed to me," was the straight answer.

Young Caird winced a little.

"Yes—perhaps—from the point of view of literature. But the language of the stage must necessarily be conventional; it is a condensation; and it has to be made effective. And it doesn't much matter, does it, how artificial the dialogue may be, so long as you are impressed by the characters——"

"And find them admirable, or lovable, or even believable and interesting. But look at that fellow," said the schoolmaster, regarding the harmless little brown book with unnecessary scorn; "look at that cowardly cur who howls and shrieks for revenge simply because a young woman has rejected his impertinent advances. Isn't that the right of every young woman, whether she is rich or poor? But this mouthing fellow, with his turgid blank verse, when she sends him back his rubbish of verses, has all his outraged

vanity set on fire—he will stop her in the open streets—he will publicly insult her—he will descend to any meanness and trickery in order to humiliate her—he will conspire with her enemies—anything—so that his own stupendous egotism and self-love may be solaced and avenged—Bah ! there has been many a hero, stuffed with sawdust, stuck up for the world to admire, but never anyone quite so despicable as that ! ”

Young Caird was still further disconcerted.

“ Well—perhaps—perhaps with regard to him ; but as for her now—as for Pauline, you know——”

“ As for her ? ” continued the ruthless schoolmaster. “ When she discovers how basely he has plotted to deceive and betray her, when she perceives all the lying he has gone through in order to fill his nutshell of a heart with the glory of revenge—revenge on a woman !—how can she stoop to such a hound ? What miracle is likely to change his character ? His monstrous vanity—his inconceivable meanness—and, worse than everything, his insufferable blank verse, would remain with him to the end of the chapter——”

The younger man tossed the book on to the table.

“ Perhaps what you say is right,” he repeated, “ from the literary point of view. Perhaps. But then you have not seen the piece acted : you have never seen the living human beings before you. Now I happen to know where it is to be played to-night.” He named a small town—which need not be more definitely particularised here—some seven or eight miles out of Glasgow. “ Would you like to see it—if you have no other engagement for this evening ? What do you say ? We could go down in a cab now to the Nick—the Nike-apteros—and I could send round a message to my livery-stable man to have a carriage got ready for us. Then we have an hour or so at the Club for a bite of something to eat—a cigarette or so in the billiard-room—and we start off. It is by far the pleasantest way of going out to —— at this time of the year ; there is no catching of trains ; and you can come away when you like. What do you say ? ”

To Allan it may have seemed a strange kind of proposal. Last night, the house of the dead : to-night, the glare of

the theatre. But, after all, this was a bizarre kind of world ; and he was getting used to diverse experiences, and perhaps becoming a little blunted ; moreover, he knew well it was no mere literary discussion that was making this young man so anxious he should see the divine Pauline tread the stage. So he assented ; a cab was called ; and they drove down to the Nike-apteros Club in West Regent Street.

It was an unpretentious little establishment ; well appointed ; and with a general look of homely cheerfulness. Besides this, owing to the early hour—and to the fact that most of the landscapers were now away in the country—they had the place almost to themselves ; the dining-room, in especial, was empty.

“And why Nike-apteros ?” Allan asked, as he looked around at the spacious apartment, with its brightly-laid tables and its pictures. “Not much like the Temple of Ægeus, surely ?”

“A very good name—a capital name,” rejoined his host, “for a lot of fellows who want to do the very best they can without too much blowing of trumpets.”

Nevertheless, it was not of any achievements, victorious or otherwise, with either pen or pencil, that they proceeded to converse, here on this pleasant summer evening, as they sate at their sufficiently frugal meal. The talk was mostly of Pauline—of Pauline, and the mysterious magic of stage-presentation ; with a little excursus in the direction of Wilhelm Meister, and De Quincey’s various judgments and findings ; though Pauline managed to reappear after the briefest possible absence. And there was also a good deal of Pauline—and of happy anticipation—as the eager-eyed young host thereafter led the way out to the open barouche that was waiting for them ; and as they drove off and through the wide-spreading suburbs. Allan had been implored to cast aside prejudice ; instead of prejudice, prepossession was now taking hold of him ; he was almost ready to abjure his heresies, and to range himself as a meek and remote adorer of Miss Deschappelles.

It was rather a rude and barn-like building, this Volunteer Hall ; but it had been made into a semblance of a theatre ; there was an act-drop ; and there was a scant

orchestra. And hardly had the two new-comers taken their seats when the music came to an end, the curtain was raised, and the first scene was disclosed—with no other than Pauline herself, ‘reclining on a sofa, R.’ Well, as shortly appeared, she was not an imposing Pauline; she was rather a diminutive little person; and her finery was sadly tarnished; but none the less her management of her train and her peacock walk across the stage lent her an imaginary height and stateliness; her figure was elegant and graceful; her softly-modulated English accent was attractive; and her delivery of blank verse—when the time came for that—was distinctly admirable. Nay, there was something more. She alone—as the play proceeded—stood out from this grotesque rabble of incompetents. Beauscant and Glavis were dreadful. Damas, with his efforts at Italian pronunciation, had well-nigh drawn from the schoolmaster one of his great explosive bursts of laughter. Claude Melnotte—the manager of this travelling company—was unmistakably drunk. But all through the ramshackle performance, there was something of dignity and charm imported by the gentle little Pauline; and when she came to her grander passages—

‘Love, sir, hath no sting.

What was the slight of a poor powerless girl,
To the deep wrong of this most vile revenge?’

or again—

‘I’ll work—

Toil—drudge—do what thou wilt—but touch me not;
Let my wrongs make me sacred!’

—she rose to the occasion; there was a genuine thrill in her voice; and the schoolmaster, all unused to stage effects, could not help exclaiming to himself in an undertone—

“Good! Good! That’s the real ring! Well done!—well done!”

Meanwhile a close observer might have perceived that Pauline had become conscious of the presence of a friend in a not over-numerous audience; and in the interval between Acts 3 and 4 a small neatly-folded note was brought to Allan’s companion.

“Will you excuse me for a moment?” said the lad,

with a mantling blush ; and he rose from his seat and disappeared.

The moment stretched into minutes, the minutes into quarters of an hour ; and still he returned not. But when the play was all over, and Allan, with the rest of the crowd, had wandered out into the street, young Caird turned up again, with abject apologies ; and here was the barouche to carry them back to Glasgow. And then, perforce, supper at the Nike Club ; and further talk ; and further talk ; amidst which the musically-voiced Pauline was not forgotten.

It was not until about a fortnight after this experience—many things happening, and many arrangements having to be made in the meantime—that Allan Henderson found leisure to write out for Jessie's amusement an account of the 'Lady of Lyons,' as he had seen it played at a provincial theatre. It was rather a malicious account—Claude Melnotte's pronunciation—

'A palace lifting to eternal s'mer,'

and his tangled feet not lending themselves to the heroic—and it may have made Jess laugh a little, in her quiet way. Anyhow, the voluminous letter was finished just as the sunset was flaring red along the lonely cliffs of Cape St. Vincent, with the solitary lighthouse sending out from time to time its sudden, golden ray ; and on the earliest possible occasion it was consigned to the post-office—that is to say, the busy little post-office in the main street of Gibraltar.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A SUMMONS.

"I HOPE I am not intruding," said the councillor, in his politest manner, as he made his appearance at the parlour-door.

"To think of such a thing !" responded the little

widow. "Come your ways in, Mr. McFadyen,—bashfulness is not needed at all : I am sure there was capital good sense in the saying they used to have when I was a girl—'*The house that we are not made welcome to, may the devil blow the roof off it!*'"

"Mother, mother, what fearful language !" cried Jess.

"But good sense—capital good sense," insisted the widow. "Take a chair, Mr. McFadyen, and give us your news !"

"Na, na," said Mr. McFadyen, modestly. "It's not me, it's Miss Jessie that has all the news now-a-days. Such long letters—and such splendid doings—I never heard the like of ; and it's but right and proper of Allan to make ye some requital of that kind, seeing the way Miss Jessie has been looking after his interests ever since he went away. I thought it was just real clever of her to get the house let to the end of the year ; no one else would have thought of it, the evening classes being such an obstacle ; but the reduced rent was the temptation, no doubt ; and a fine thing for Allan—he ought to be greatly obliged to ye——"

"Oh, yes—oh, yes," remarked the widow. "Allan and her, they get on fine when the breadth of Europe is between them ; but if he were back here to-morrow, she would be at him again with her scoff-scoffing—the poor, good-natured lad, that has hardly a word to say for himself——"

"Allan—good-natured !" retorted Jess, in well-feigned amazement. "The temper of a mule, you mean ! Good-natured ? It's not Allan Henderson you're speaking of, mother, is it ?"

"For shame—for shame !" said the widow, angrily. "Snap-snapping at him behind his back ! And the poor lad with not too many friends——"

"Oh, as for that," continued Jess, as she took down from the mantel-shelf a closely-written letter of several pages, "he can have but little time to think about us or anything we may be saying of him. Look at this, Mr. McFadyen ; here is the last budget ; and it's a description of grandeurs enough to turn anybody's head. First of all, he tells us about the Salaamluk——"

"Ay, just think of that, now, Mr. McFadyen," said the widow—without attempting to pronounce the word.

"I'm not quite sure," the councillor put in, when Jess proceeded——

"That is the state procession of the Sultan to the mosque. And it appears that the English Ambassador got cards of admission for Mr. Caird and Allan—admission to a pavilion, where they saw everything quite close by. Then the next day that had an invitation to visit the Imperial palaces—the Beyler-Bey and the Dolma Baghcha on the Bosphorus, and the Seraglio in Stamboul; and the Aide-de-camp came for them in one of His Majesty's caïques—a long, beautiful boat, with ten rowers in costumes of white silk and red fez; and the two visitors were shown the wonderful display of jewels in the Treasury; and were served with rose-leaf jam in cups encrusted with precious stones——"

"Do ye hear that—do ye hear that, Mr. McFadyen!" interposed Mrs. Maclean, not without a trace of exultation.

The Golden Horn—the Sweet Waters—the Suleimanieh—the Seven Towers; these were brave words; and Allan's description of Constantinople by moonlight was no doubt vivid enough; but all the same Mr. McFadyen began to grow impatient and even resentful. He was losing in importance. He was being ignored. In the face of all these glories and dignities, what became of his position as a member of Duntroone Town Council?

"I would just say this," he observed, "that as a kind of theatrical representation, what you have been reading, Miss Jessie, is very remarkable. But I'm thinking that a man's value in the world depends on what he can do within his own sphere. It is there he must make his influence felt—it is there he becomes of consequence. I dare say, now, that after such a parade of Eastern magnificence and glitter, a question like the granting of spirit licences, here in Duntroone, must look a small and contemptible affair——"

"Indeed no—indeed no, Mr. McFadyen!" the widow protested. "What can interest us more than what is happening just close around us?"

He turned to her with alacrity.

"Ah, I see ye understand, Mrs. Maclean," he said. "Ye understand what is of main consequence to us. And I will say this for myself, that when we came to consider

whether we should grant any further spirit licences, my brother Councillors were all at sixes and sevens, until I made the suggestion that the people themselves should be asked what they wanted. 'And how are you going to do that?' says they. 'Why, by a plebiscity,' says I. 'The simplest thing possible.'"

"Ye're right there, Mr. McFadyen," agreed the widow. "There's nothing like publicity. I'm no for any hole-and-corner business—no, no! Ye must keep an eye on them, Mr. McFadyen."

"There's one or two things," continued the councillor, in a serious and thoughtful fashion, "that I would like to see done while I have life and health spared me to attend to these public concerns. There's the condition of the North Pier—as I've said many a time before, it's a disgrace, a perfect disgrace. And if we cannot acquire the property for ourselves—if the Board of Trade cannot help us—then at the very least we might make some arrangement about sanitary appliances. Why, a good sloshing-down every morning with a solution of carbolic acid—that of itself would be something."

"Ye're right again, Mr. McFadyen," chimed in the widow, nodding approval. "Carbolic acid's the thing—it's just the best anti-semitic there is——"

"Is it antiseptic you mean, mother?" Jess interposed, rather crossly.

"Ay, that's what I said," continued the widow, with much complacency. "I'm sure the state of the North Pier is just crying aloud for something to be done."

"I have undertaken to give it my best attention," said the councillor, grandly; and he would probably have gone on to mention one or two further and important reforms but that at this moment a new-comer appeared, all eyes being instantly turned towards him.

It was the shoemaker. Long Lanchlan seemed perturbed and agitated; and his excuses for this sudden intrusion were somewhat incoherent.

"I had just half-a-minute," said he. "It was the only shelter I could find; and I'm sure, Mrs. Maclean, you will not object to my coming in—until—until he has gone by."

"But who, Lauchlan?" asked the widow. "What is the matter?"

"It's that desperate man, Red Murdoch from Salen," responded Lauchie, with another timorous glance towards the front shop, "and I was hearing that he was in the town and inquiring for me everywhere; and thinks I to myself I will keep out of the road, and he will be going awah hom by the evening steamer. Ay, and would you believe it, I was coming along Campbell Street, and there was he turning out of the lane by the Bank of Scotland, and if I had not escaped in here, he would hef got hold of me, and that's the Bible's truth——"

"But what did he want with you?" Jess demanded—though there were dark suspicions in her mind, prompting her to giggle.

"Oh, he's a terrible man, that," said Long Lauchie, in an awe-stricken way. "If Red Murdoch is for the drink, there's no holding him back, no nor anyone he gets by the arm; and I heard he was searching for me—me that's a Rechabite, and an officer of the Tent! But maybe he's gone by now——"

"What nonsense it is you are talking, Lauchlan Mac-Intyre!" said the widow, sharply. "Are you telling me that anyone can make you drink if you're not that way inclined? Where is your courage? I would not be frightened into any corner, if I were you—no, not for twenty Red Murdochs! Are you not free to walk along the streets? What kind of a country is this we're living in, then? I am ashamed to hear you, Lauchlan!"

Long Lauchie regarded her for a second.

"You're a woman, Mrs. Maclean," said he, mysteriously. "And you hef no experience of Red Murdoch when he comes back from Calder Market, and would like a dram with one of his old friends. But he must have gone by now—yes, indeed—he must hef gone by; and it's much obliged I am to you, Mrs. Maclean, for giving me the shelter: and I will go out now and down to the shore, and get a boat, and a lad to pull me over to Ardentrive Bay; and I will stop there until I see the Mull steamer passing out. Me that's a Rechabite could not be seen going into a public-house with Red Murdoch, no matter what money

he may have got at Calder.—May the Good Being preserve us ! ”

This last ejaculation was in Gaelic. For there was a sound as of someone entering the front shop. But this was no great red-bearded drover—this was Niall Gorach, who came to the half-opened door, peering in with his elfin eyes.

“Aw, Mr. MacIntyre,” said he, “it is here you are ; and Red Murdoch he was sending me to find you ; and I am to tell him where you are——”

“Son of the devil ! ” exclaimed Lauchlan—and he made a step forward, and seized the lad by the shoulder. “This is what you will be telling him now—are you listening ?—you will tell Red Murdoch that my mother is dead, and the funeral will be in a week or two, and I hef gone awch to Appin for the funeral, and it will be a month before I am back. Do you hear me now ? Off with you, and find out Red Murdoch ; and tell him I am dead, and my mother is dead ; and he is to go awch home by the evening steamer. Do you understand me now ? ”

Perhaps Niall Gorach did, and perhaps he did not ; at all events he disappeared ; and Lauchlan turned with an air of apology to the widow.

“Mebbe, Mrs. Maclean, you will not mind my staying a few minntes longer. For Red Murdoch he might be in one street, or another street ; but he’ll be going awch hom by the evening boat whatever ; and people that does not want to be drinking will be left in peace and quietness.”

Alas ! at this very instant there was another sound outside—on the pavement and in the front shop—that re-awakened the conscious fear in Lauchlan’s eyes ; it was a tread, heavy and irregular, that could not be mistaken for the catlike approach of Niall Gorach. Almost simultaneously a gigantic form appeared at the door ; and the great, shaggy visage of Red Murdoch stared bemusedly in upon the little group. At first he did not seem to recognise anyone—not even the shoemaker, who had slunk into a twilit corner.

“A mild woman—a mild woman,” said the huge drover, in Gaelic, as he regarded Mrs. Maclean.

“A young girl—a handsome young girl,” he continued,

in his occult approval, as for a moment he contemplated Jess.

But now he came to Lauchie, half-hidden in that dusky retreat ; and at once a roar of delighted laughter broke from him ; he strode forward and laid a vast and hairy paw on the arm of the shrinking shoemaker.

"Are you there, son of my heart ! And it is a good day, this day, when I have the money in my pocket, and Long Lauchlan to be coming with me for a dram. It is a fine day, this day : Lauchlan, my son, the grass that is not grown is suitable for the unborn calf ; but here I have the money ; and my thanks to the good chance that brings me a friend——"

"Away—away !" cried Lauchlan, trying to free himself from that tremendous grip. "I am not for any drink. I will not have any drink. I am not one of the drinking kind——"

The stupefied drover gazed and gazed ; and then he shook his head savagely, as if he would clear his brain from these encumbering and bewildering mists and fogs ; and then he tried to drag the shoemaker out into the open, to see if it was possible to understand what all this meant. But now it was that the councillor intervened. Mr. McFadyen was a little man, and rather fat and scant of breath ; nevertheless he had a valiant soul—especially when Jessie Maclean happened to be looking on ; and without more ado he seized Red Murdoch by the elbow.

"Let the man alone !" said he. "Are you not aware that he has become a Rechabite ?"

"And who are you ?" said the big drover, turning to glare down on this audacious interloper.

"I am a member of the town-council," replied Peter, without one pin's point of quailing, "and I have sufficient influence with the police-authorities to see that no one is allowed to come into any house and disturb and frighten decent, quiet people."

"Oh, there is no frightening of anyone," said Jess, who indeed was more inclined to laugh. "But if you are going by the evening steamer, Mr. Murdoch, it is about time you were walking along to the quay ; and Mr. McFadyen's house is close by ; and I am sure, if you went along with

him, he would be glad to have a parting glass with you—and you could leave Mr. MacIntyre to his own ways and habits.”

But at this Red Murdoch drew himself up.

“Who goes through the thorns for me, I’ll go through the briars for him,” he said, in a dignified manner. “And I will take a parting glass with the gentleman, if he is agreeable. But it is not I that am in the custom of going from one house to another house and asking for a glass of whisky, when I can pay for my own whisky. And as for the Rechabites : well, I hope there will be plenty of Rechabites, and more and more Rechabites—until the devil takes them to light his fires with !”

And thereupon the red-bearded Mull drover—still somewhat proud and offended—suffered himself to be led away by the councillor ; while Long Lauchie, tremulously thankful over his escape from this formidable temptation, came forth from his corner, and went sadly away home. And all that the little widow said, when they had quitted the premises, was this—

“The men are strange folk. And it’s a Heaven’s mercy when they dinna come to blows.”

But during the subsequent and grateful quiet Jess remained for a long time silent and absent-minded ; and she still held Allan Henderson’s letter in her hand.

“Mother,” she said, after a while, “I suppose, now, Mr. McFadyen will imagine that Allan is thinking only of himself and all these fine adventures. I did not care to read any more of the letter to him. What would be the use ? And what am I to answer to Allan himself, and to all his anxious questionings—week after week—week after week—very soon it will be months—and me with hardly a word of news to send him ? How can I make him understand that Barbara will not write, and that she will not see any one, and that her only wish appears to be that she should be forgotten, and her name never mentioned among us ? And what is to come of it ? Sometimes I am dreading that there will be a terrible harm.”

And again she said—

“Mother, would you mind if I went through to Glasgow for a few days, or maybe longer ? Mrs. Guthrie might

give me a bed ; for I would not like to be all by myself in a temperance hotel in a big town like that. I must see Barbara—I cannot sleep at nights for thinking of her——”

“And many’s the wakeful hour I have,” rejoined the little widow, “over the poor lass and her troubles. And as you say, Jessie, what will come of it, if she refuses every permission, and will have no comfort and no hope, and wishes to be as one that is dead to us ? She was brought up in the fresh air and the open ; and to be shut close within black walls—dear, dear me !—what is to come of it ? ”

“Mother,” the girl said, “I will go to Glasgow—and you must not hurry me back.”

So next day Jess made her small preparations, and set out for the great city ; and there she received a most friendly welcome from Mrs. Guthrie, who kept a baker’s shop in the Gallowgate. At first her letters home were filled merely with a vague misgiving ; a misgiving that was perhaps mainly caused by her perplexity ; for she could not fathom and get to comprehend this strange mood of mind on the part of the hapless prisoner. But after a while those letters struck a sharper note of alarm ; and at last there arrived a telegram begging Mrs. Maclean to go through to Glasgow at once, or, if that were impossible, to send Mr. McFadyen in her stead.

CHAPTER L.

FAREWELL !

ONE morning towards noon two travellers who had arrived at Calais over-night were walking up and down the breezy promenade of the Quai de Marée, with an occasional glance now at the boats in the harbour and again at the wide waters of the Channel, that were flashing and rushing in silver-and-yellow before a brisk east wind.

“Well, Henderson,” said the younger of the two, “you’ve

come a precious long way for what seems to me a mere matter of convention."

"Convention?" repeated the schoolmaster, abruptly. "What convention? I could do nothing else. What else could I do?"

"I beg your pardon," continued the younger man, with quick pacification, "perhaps I should have said a matter of principle. Anyhow, all that sad business in Glasgow must have been long over by now; and I hardly understand why you should have thought it necessary——"

"At the very least," said his companion, "I can go on to Duntroone, and thank those good friends who stood in my place, when I was far enough away. No: my starting for home, as soon as that message reached me at Moudanieh, was an inevitable thing; I could not do otherwise; but you—why you should have undertaken such a tedious and aimless journey—only to stop here—I have not been able to make that out yet——"

"Why I came back with you?" said young Caird, lightly. "Why I came on to Calais? Oh, for a frolic. Or for company's sake. Or to practise self-denial. Self-denial, most likely. You see, there can't be anything to do in this dull little hole of a town; so, until you reappear, I suppose I shall spend most of my time on this promenade, strolling about, and addressing polished and elegant speeches to my respected relatives over the water. 'My dear friends, if you were to learn that I had returned so far, and that at this moment I was almost within sight of English shores, you would no doubt jump to the conclusion that I meant to cross; and you would be delighted to think that a certain compact was about to be broken. But I am not going to do anything of the kind—not at all. I am playing far too important a stake. There is a little matter of family recognition to be added in, when the stipulated year expires, and when I shall have the pleasure of presenting to you a young person whose accomplishments, and refinement, and grace will be quite an addition to your domestic circles—and something of a novelty too.'"

But here the lame lad sent a rather wistful look away to the north.

"After all, Henderson, it is a temptation," he confessed.

"I do believe, if I were to cross with you by this next boat, I could slip through to Glasgow without any chance of being discovered, and meet you somewhere on the way back. Let's see : you'll be in London between four and five ; then on by the Scotch mail to-night ; Glasgow quite early to-morrow morning. Then the—the company are playing at Falkirk just now——"

"How do you know that ?" said the schoolmaster, turning upon him sharply.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid," responded the lad, with a laugh. "Direct communication only is forbidden in the bond ; and there's been nothing of that kind. But one may have a friend here or there, don't you perceive ?"

"Yes," observed the schoolmaster, "you seem to have borne this separation, so far, with great equanimity."

"Oh, I assure you, I have kept strictly to the terms !" the younger man exclaimed, placidly. "Not but that there may have been moments—just now, for example—when one's common sense rebels. Or which is the common-sense—impatience over this preposterous compact, or the determination, now that so much has been gone through, to hold on to the end ? That is a conundrum I can study while you are away in the north ; and you have been setting me a good many of late to puzzle over. I remember a very pretty one—'Can any natural instinct or impulse be in itself criminal, or is it only criminal in so far as society, for its own protective purposes, chooses to declare it criminal !' That's a very dainty suggestion—something like a cartload of dynamite fit to burst up the whole moral order of the universe. For example, my natural impulse at this moment, if I were within reach of that fishing-smack, would be to tip the skipper into the sea. Is there any such loathsome sight as a fat Frenchman in a temper ? Look at his clenched fists—look at him jumping and dancing with rage—listen to his howls and shrieks at those jibing and mocking people on the quay—and every moment he knows the wind is carrying him further and further out of hearing. But come away, now," he continued, "and let's walk along to the steamer. And about my natural impulse to tip that skipper into the sea : wasn't it perfectly justifiable ? If society were to declare it criminal, it would

be because society had never witnessed such a deplorable exhibition."

"Lad, lad," said the schoolmaster, absently, "it is well with you that you can make a joke of such questions. Sometimes they come a little more seriously into human life."

That was all ; and there was no unkindliness in the hint ; but the younger man, who had got to know a good deal of his companion's story, quickly and skilfully changed the subject—and easily, too, for now they were about to separate, and their final arrangements had to be made.

And thus it was that Allan Henderson, journeying alone, made his way northward to Glasgow, where indeed there was not much for him to do beyond visiting two graves—grave of wife and grave of friend ; and in his long reveries he may have pondered over the strangely devious paths by which those two children of the far and lonely outer isles, who in life had never known each other, had at length reached this last resting-place, within sight and sound of the great murmuring city. As for him, Glasgow had become a town of dark memories and regrets ; and he seemed to breathe more freely when on the next day he found himself in the train that was bearing him away out to the western seas—though nevertheless he looked back, and still looked back, so long as any of the grey houses and the tall chimneys were visible.

It was rather a wet and boisterous afternoon when in due course he arrived at the well-known little station fronting the harbour ; but delicious to his nostrils were the soft, fresh, rain-laden gusts that blew in across the bay ; and he forgot all about Pentelicus, and Marathon, and the basking slopes of Hymettus when he beheld the ancient and ivied castle tall and dark against the windy skies, and when he saw the wild cloud-wreaths moving and intertwisting in silver and purple above the sombre Morven hills. His heart swelled, and his throat was like to choke him, when he heard the kindly speech from which he had so long been absent ; and he was glad that neither Jessie Maclean nor her mother was here to meet him ; if he had been less agitated he might have guessed that it was only part of Jess's thoughtfulness that had made them stay away, while

here was the alert and indefatigable Mr. McFadyen to represent them.

"I was to ask you to excuse them," said the councillor, eagerly snatching at handbags and parcels, whether they belonged to Allan or not, "and I've got a room ready for you at my house, for, as ye've doubtless heard, your own house has been let; but the widow and the daughter will be glad to see you later on, when you've plenty of time, and when you've got more accustomed to the town——"

At this Allan stopped short, and stood stock still—here amongst the luggage, and the porters, and the bustling passengers.

"McFadyen, what is't you mean?" said he. "Do they hold me answerable for all that has happened? Has Mrs. Maclean cast me out?"

"Dod bless my soul and body!" exclaimed the councillor, in great confusion and fright; was this the result of his trying to obey Jess Maclean's earnest injunctions? "You'll not let a body speak! They thought they might be in the way—and—and I've got everything arranged for ye—as well as I could in my poor dwelling; and we'll go along to see the Macleans as soon as ever you like, I mean as soon as you've had a bite of something. And the thrashing—oh, yes, Miss Jessie was sure ye'd like to hear of the fearful thrashing I gave the station-master on Saturday afternoon: ye see, Jamie Gilmour has been out o' practice all through the summertime because of being so busy—morning till night far too busy to think of the links——"

By this time Mr. McFadyen had secured a porter; and when Allan's not very cumbrous luggage had been put on the barrow, the two friends set out to accompany it—for the councillor's house was but a little way off.

"And then," continued Peter, with dawning merriment, "I'll tell ye the truth—I'll confess the truth: I had been practising pretty hard, and not letting on to Jamie. There's Tolmie, the professional, hanging about the now; and I was getting a few bit lessons from him, d'ye understand—on the quiet; so that when the ball did happen to trinkle away down into that beast of a hollow by the dyke, I began to find myself no just quite so helpless—Here, you thick-headed gomeril, where the mischief are ye going?"

This last execration was hurled at the porter, who, having recognised the schoolmaster, and assuming that this was the schoolmaster's luggage, was for leaving the harbour-front to get away up to Battery Terrace. When it had again been forced in on his mind that they were all of them bound for the councillor's dwelling, Peter continued his brisk conversation—as had been enjoined on him.

"It was a wonderful clever thing," said he, "of Miss Jessie to get your house let to those friends o' hers from Peterhead; for it suits them just splendid—the ailing lass having been ordered to try the soft west-country air; and it matters little to them to have the lower rooms occupied by the Latin classes for an hour or two in the evening——"

"If Mr. Fenwick would not mind," said Allan, "I would like to look in for a few minutes to-night just to see the lads."

"To be sure—to be sure! Capital—a capital idea!" cried Peter, approvingly; and now they were arrived at his house; and here was the great, gawky, good-natured, gooseberry-eyed servant lass, ready to help with the luggage; and in the adjoining parlour the dinner-table was laid—and laid for two only.

For this also was part of Jessie's kindly scheming; though her mother had furtively cried a little when she learned that Allan, on his return home, was to be received in a strange house. But Jess insisted; she would have no family gathering over the way, with its painful blank only too conspicuous; and of course she found in the councillor a willing ally. So it was that Peter and his guest sate down at this table by themselves; and the big, bland servant-lass brought in successively cockie-leekie, boiled salmon, and roast fowl and bacon; while the loquacious host, suddenly remembering that he had dropped the story of the discomfiture and dismay of the station-master, resumed the narrative, and launched into a Homeric description of his own exploits and his enemy's chagrin.

"Dod, man," he cried, between bursts of irrepressible laughter, "ye never saw any human creature in such a state of bewilderment. All the tricks that Tolmie had been showing me seemed to come in handy from the very beginning—but more especially at the dyke—more especially

at the dyke—for I made a bad hash of my first attempt, and the ball did not get over, and Jamie he sets to work sniggering. ‘Peter,’ says he, ‘away back wi’ ye thirty yards, and try again.’ ‘Jamie,’ says I, ‘keep a calm sough for a minute.’ And then I gets out my lofter; and I steadied my aim; and click! goes the ball into the air—well and clean over and away! ‘It’s an infernal fluke!’ says he. ‘I’ll bet ye half a crown on the game!’ says I. ‘Done with you, Peter,’ says he, ‘and you’ll be whistling another tune before I’ve finished with ye!’ Was I? Was I?” continued the councillor, with another hilarious roar. “Man, ye should have seen Jamie get angrier and angrier as we went on; and when he grows savage, it’s all up with him; he just bashes the ground.—I wonder there’s an ounce of land or soil left in Argyllshire! And his astonishment when we got to the end, and totted up the scores! ‘Jamie,’ says I, ‘what kind of a tune would ye like to be whistling now?’ ‘Oh, go to the devil!’ says he—and ye can imagine what’s in a man’s mind when that’s all he’s got to say for himself.—Allan, Miss Jessie was saying maybe you yourself would like to take a turn round the links to-morrow.”

The schoolmaster shook his head.

“I must get away again as soon as ever I can,” said he. “Young Caird is waiting for me in Calais; and very friendly of him it was to come all the way across Europe with me.”

“And for how long are you off again?”

“For some nine months or so—whatever will make up a year from the time we first started.”

The councillor hesitated for a second or so.

“Then maybe you would like to go along at once to Mrs. Maclean’s?”

“Well, I would—though I need not hurry you.”

“I was to bring you as soon as it was convenient to yourself,” McFadyen interposed, dexterously; and in a few minutes the two men were outside and on their way to Campbell Street.

It was a sad enough meeting; but Mr. McFadyen had had his instructions; the talk was about all manner of ordinary things, with occasional references to Allan’s forth-

coming departure and future plans. It is true that now and again the eyes of the little widow would fill with tears, even when she was trying to join in as bravely as any of them; and Jess seemed rather to keep apart—she was summoned away more than once to the front shop; it was on Peter McFadyen that the difficulties of the situation chiefly fell, and he acquitted himself admirably. Nor was there any need to wish the councillor away, that more intimate questions might be asked and answered; for Jess had communicated all the news by letter; up to the arrival of the schoolmaster at Calais, he had heard from her at every possible point. Perhaps it was for this reason that she now held herself somewhat aloof.

At length Mr. McFadyen took out his watch and said—

“I’m thinking, Allan, you had some intention of going up to the Terrace to look in on those lads. They’ll be at work now——”

“Indeed, yes,” said the schoolmaster, rising. “And yet I’ve not said a word to you, Mrs. Maclean, nor to you, Jessie, about the gratitude I owe you for all you’ve done for me. I’m just crushed into silence—I cannot speak——”

“And the least said the better, Allan,” returned the widow, with the tears showing again. “It would have been a good thing for you if you had never seen any of us——”

“Well, come along,” said McFadyen, briskly. “I’m sure the lads will be glad to be remembered.” And therewith—Jess somewhat lingering in the background—the councillor and Allan said good-night to their friends, and left the little parlour that used to be so familiar.

The youths were all busy at their tasks up there in Battery Terrace; but when Allan appeared at the door—doubtful about entering, and ready to apologise for his interruption—first one and then another turned and recognised him, and presently there was a general if timid rapping of knuckles on the wooden desks to give him a welcome. Still uncertain as to whether he should go or leave, he could but nod a greeting to this or that well-known face; and then, drawn by old association and remembrances, he made bold to step forward; while the young man who

was his substitute rose from his chair and came along to meet him.

"No, no," said Allan. "I must not hinder you. Go on; and I will sit down here for a minute or two." And he took a seat at the end of the nearest bench, as it chanced by the side of one of the youngest of the students, who had been a special favourite of his.

The master in charge was equal to the occasion. He announced that he would send round, written on a piece of paper, a literal translation of a couple of verses from Ovid; and the students could then occupy themselves in turning the English back into Latin. Nor did he leave them without a little friendly guidance here and there, when he had read out the English lines; he suggested one or two of the equivalents; reminded them of the difference between "*capillus*," "*coma*," and "*crinis*"; and so forth; and then, when he had set them all going, he returned to Allan and to Mr. McFadyen, free to talk about the business of the school or anything else they pleased.

It was to the councillor he had to address himself; for Allan was much too interested in the efforts of the diligent youth who was seated next him. It was quite mechanical work, of course, this dove-tailing of longs and shorts to secure the necessary six feet and five; but nevertheless it demanded some little ingenuity; and as the lad had quickly jotted down two or three alternatives of the principal nouns, Allan (who was not acquainted with the original) could at least indicate with his forefinger what might be tried next as a solution of the puzzle. Well, as it subsequently turned out, those two together did not quite arrive at the elegance of Ovid; but they were not so very far away from it; and the master eventually proclaimed—amidst general giggling—that Mr. Henderson and his companion might be said to have produced a very creditable version.

"Ah, I'd like fine to be back among those boys again," said Allan, as he and the councillor were strolling homewards together, for a final pipe and a chat before getting to bed.

"All in good time—all in good time, Allan, lad," responded Mr. McFadyen, cheerfully. "And in the mean-

while I'm glad to hear that the numbers are not dropping off—no, no—rather the reverse.”

Next day Allan was to leave by the 12.40 train ; and as he was to be away for so long, Mrs. Maclean herself came to the platform, accompanied by Jess. Mr. McFadyen was also here ; likewise, of course, the station-master ; and one or two others. Long Lauchie did not put in an appearance, for he would have had to pass the refreshment-room twice, and he was avoiding such places.

“ And we'll not be seeing you now, Allan, till the middle of next summer,” said the little widow ; “ and who can tell what may happen through all the long, long winter ? ”

“ Why, the best—we must just hope for the best ! ” said the councillor, gallantly. “ And whether it's to be eight months, or whether it's to be ten months, Allan knows first-rate where there's a welcome always waiting for him.”

The guard came up, and a move was made for the carriages. There was much hand-shaking, and bidding of good-bye ; and even Jess, who had rather hung back, had now to advance, to take farewell—which she did silently.

“ And you will write to us often and often,” this was the widow's last word, as the train began to move, “ and Jessie will write back to you, and tell you all that is going on—will you not now, Jessie ? ”

But Jess did not seem to hear—and presently the line of carriages had crept away from the platform, and was bending round the curve that in a moment or two would completely hide it from sight.

CHAPTER LI.

“ AT EACH REMOVE.”

It was during this winter that the widow began to give herself airs. On some former occasions the Purser had been rather inclined to impose on this little circle—or, at least, to impress it—with his talk of travel ; but now that Allan's budgets of news kept arriving every other week or

so, the Purser's foreign experiences shrank into insignificance ; and Mrs. Maclean was proud to know that it was one of her own kith and kin—one of her own family almost—who had these wonderful tales to tell. At first Jessie, to whom the letters were addressed, allowed her mother free access to them ; and the widow would read and re-read them, asking questions, and discreetly getting to understand, before communicating with her neighbours.

"Dear me, Jess," she would say, for example, "what's this he writes about the Americans?—about the Americans continually boasting of their manifest density? It's not possible! Poor things, they cannot be so stupid as all that!"

"It's their manifest destiny, mother," Jess would make answer, with a touch of impatience. "The Americans stupid? Don't you see what he says further on?—that there's but the one thing left for them to invent—and they'll be having it before long—and that's a mechanical maidservant. He says that when the American man gets to realise the misery that the American woman endures through the difficulties of domestic service, he is bound to come to her aid with machinery."

But in process of time Jess grew more chary of showing these letters ; and at length she kept them entirely to herself, merely reading out to her mother such accounts of ongoings and adventures as might be expected to interest her. For Allan had but the one true and safe confidante in his former home ; and there were many intimate and personal things he could write about to Jess that Jess alone could comprehend ; and perhaps some of these things, seen from afar and with clearer vision, were altering in look. Anyhow, Jess no longer showed the letters ; and perhaps her mother did not notice the changed condition of affairs ; she was satisfied to hear that Allan was in excellent spirits and quite delighted with his travelling companion.

Not that the closing months of the old year were otherwise devoid of incident. Far from it. All kinds of things were happening. The station-master won the great golfing handicap, carrying off the silver-plated claret-jug which now adorns his sideboard. Niall Gorach and three other lads were indicted for trespassing on the grounds of

Aultnashellach, in pursuit of rabbits ; but the charge was found not proven, though the Sheriff significantly refused to allow their expenses. The shoemaker had found a new doctrine and principle of human life, which he preached to all and sundry ; and which, interpreted from the Gaelic, and reduced to a more compact formula, was to the effect that “tea and religion were the two supreme comforts of existence ; but that a wise man would avoid immoderate indulgence in either.” The councillor had been prevailed upon to receive for a time a nephew of his who had fallen ill in Glasgow—Mrs. Maclean observed that the doctors had hinted something about “angelina pectoris”—and so completely did the sea air restore the young man to his ordinary health, and so frankly did he show himself interested in his uncle’s business, that Mr. McFadyen had serious thoughts of taking him in as a junior partner, to the securing, later on, of some portion of leisure for himself. Then, one morning, the steamer *Islesman*, from the Outer Hebrides, hove in sight with all her flags flying ; and as she came sailing into the entrance of the bay, she fired off her signal-cannon with a report that sent the jackdaws about the ivied ruin squawking and yawping into the breezy and silver skies. The reason soon became known. Jack Ogilvie, formerly Purser of the *Aros Castle*, was on board ; and he was bringing with him his blushing bride, who hitherto had been the Widow McAlister, proprietress of the Anchor Hotel, Portree. There were many people in Duntroone ready and glad to greet the newly-married couple ; but all the same Jack Ogilvie found time to call upon the Macleans ; and his wife—a buxom, pleasant-featured young woman of thirty, with coal-black hair and cheeks of the colour of red pickled cabbage (for the wind was gusty and cold)—received a most friendly welcome from Jess and her mother. They were going south on their wedding-jauunt—perhaps even as far as London ; but it was intimated that on their return the fortunate bridegroom was to take up his position as general manager of the Anchor Hotel, which is a famous and flourishing hostelry in those distant parts.

By and bye came the New Year ; and with it there arrived a capacious chest that had been sent all the way

from Yokohama. When the widow, with the eager curiosity of a child, began to undo the unfamiliar and convoluted packing-material, her delight soon gave way to amazement.

"Preserve us!" she cried. "Where could Allan get the money to waste on all this extravagance—I never saw the like——"

"Mother," said Jess, "did I not tell you? Most of the things are from Mr. Caird."

"But how could Mr. Caird be hearing anything about me or you?" continued the widow, as with cautious fingers she unwound the bandages from an extremely pretty tea-set. "How was he to know anything about us?"

Jess looked a little embarrassed.

"Well," said she, "Allan was sending me a kind of explanation, that during many a long hour of travel he used to talk about the people at home; and Mr. Caird got it into his head that he had become quite acquainted with us; and he is a whimsical and obstinate young gentleman—so Allan says; and when there was some mention made of the possibility of sending a New-Year's-Day present, he would insist on taking part. And Mr. Caird wrote a letter too——"

"Ay?—and why did ye not show it to me? Where is it?"

Jess pretended to be busy with the cups; and her mother did not notice the slight colour that had mounted to the girl's forehead.

"Mr. Caird's letter, do you mean, mother?" she said. "It is over at the house. But it is only a sort of friendly apology for sending you these things; and he writes in a very nice and good-natured way. He says he is greatly obliged to you; for it is of such importance that one's travelling companion should be contented in mind; and Allan was satisfied and at rest because you were looking after all his affairs for him in his absence——"

But here the mother did grow suspicious.

"Jess," said she, abruptly, "go at once and get me that letter."

"But maybe I burned it, mother," she answered.

"Then are you telling me lies about what was in it?"

“Why should I?” said Jess—but with averted face.

“Because if the young man knows anything at all about it,” said the widow, boldly, “he must know very well that it is you, and not me, that has been looking after Allan’s affairs. Very well he must know that; and very well Allan knows it; and the two of them together, when they were buying these presents to be sent across the sea, who was it they were thinking of? It was you, Jessie—and no one else—that is as clear as the daylight; and you need not stand there to deny it. Would they be sending these fine pieces of silk and sewing to one at my years?”

“Mother, you are entirely mistaken,” said Jess, quite as bluntly. “Did you not look at the label?—I think that is the best proof of all! They have been sent to you, and they are yours; I am not wishing for any of them; and by and bye we will see what can be made of them for you. That will be your best way of thanking Allan, when he comes back to his own country.”

But there was many a long day and many a long month to be got through before there was any prospect of that wistfully looked-for return; though as time went on those many-paged communications that Jess so carefully treasured up and concealed began to arrive from ever-lessening distances. And at last there came an afternoon; and the councillor insisted and better insisted that Miss Jessie should go along with him to the station; and those two, when the train slowed in and stopped, beheld a stranger step out from one of the compartments—a bronzed and bearded man, whose dark eyes aflame with delight seemed to say he was not so much of a stranger after all; and Jess, involuntarily shrinking back, would have the councillor go forward to receive him; and this McFadyen, when he had recovered his senses, instantly proceeded to do. But the next moment Jess found both her hands caught and held.

“I’ve seen many a place since I left you last, Jessie,” Allan said, “but never one half as welcome as the first glimpse of Duntroone Bay.”

“But where’s your luggage, man?—where the mischief is your luggage?” cried the councillor, determined on asserting his importance.

Then the schoolmaster had to turn to explain, rather

nervously, that he had not brought any luggage with him. He had come straight away through as quickly as ever he could. His immediate plans were not fixed yet. And so, with many questions and answers, the three of them set out for Campbell Street, Jess alone keeping somewhat silent.

The widow was greatly pleased with the change in Allan's appearance ; she declared that his beard, his robust frame, his firmer carriage, lent him an air of authority that was necessary for a schoolmaster ; she was proud to hear that he had nearly finished his translation of the unpronounceable poem, and that already he had secured a publisher ; and she had no sufficient words of praise for young Mr. Caird, who had undertaken to befriend Allan Henderson in more ways than one.

“And, maybe, Allan, lad,” she continued, blithely, “maybe Jessie was right after all, when she was telling us of the great things in store for you, and when she was urging you to do this and do that. Maybe it will be coming true. That was a fine saying they used to have : ‘*The day is longer than the brae : we will win to the top yet.*’ And surely you’ve had enough of wandering now ; when are you going to settle down among your own folk ?”

The question seemed to disconcert him, and he evaded it somehow ; for indeed, despite his obvious happiness in being once more in the midst of these old friends, from time to time a look of uncertainty and care would cross his face, as if all were not well. However, at this moment the girl Christina appeared to take charge of the shop ; and the widow, rising, forthwith invited her guests to step across to the house, where supper had been left in readiness for them. She herself led the way, and the councillor was talking to her ; Jess and Allan followed—with little speech between them.

But as they were going along the twilight entrance leading to the staircase, Allan put his hand gently on her arm, and in obedience to this mute prayer she lingered behind for a moment, while the others passed out of sight.

“I got your letter in Glasgow, Jessie,” said he, in an undertone. “And is that the last word you have for me ?”

“Are we not better as we are ?” she made answer, with her eyes downcast. “Did you not hear what mother was

saying a minute ago, of the future that seems lying before you?——”

“I know nothing about that,” he replied. “And whatever it might be, I should have no interest in it, I should have no care in it, unless you were with me. Jessie, do you think I cannot recognise how stupid and blind I have been? I never knew what you were—well, I knew you were always and always my best and dearest friend and ally—but I never knew what you really were until one after the other those long letters came; and then you spoke so freely and so kindly; it was like yourself talking, with nobody by; and many’s the night I lay awake reading and re-reading, page after page, and trying to think I could hear the tides off Lismore, and smell the scent of the wind blowing down from the hills. And then when I ventured in writing back to you to say one or two things—wondering whether our close and sure friendship might not blossom into something finer and nearer—and when I found that you were not so very angry—I began to dream wild dreams. I suppose I was mistaken. I suppose you thought, with such a distance between us, that it was hardly necessary to be strict and cautious of speech. But now—if this is to be your last word—this that I got at Glasgow——”

“Allan,” she said, piteously, “surely we are better off as we are——”

“Oh, I know there are plenty of reasons why you should not throw yourself away on one such as I,” he exclaimed. “Do you think I do not know! Plenty of reasons—do you think I have not pondered over them, night after night? And I suppose it was a sort of madness of impertinence that got hold of me, to think that any such possibility could come into my life. But I do not wish to vex you, Jessie, or harass you; I can go—and this time for good.”

“But why not let us be as we are, Allan?” she said again—and not even yet did she dare to raise her eyes.

When he spoke, it was in a grave kind of way.

“That is my decree of banishment, then,” he said, slowly; “and Duntroone will see me no more.”

Nothing short of consternation prevailed at the little supper-table when it became known that the schoolmaster

was leaving the very next morning; and the councillor, anxious to hide his ignorance and bewilderment, could only seek refuge in the remark that if Allan went by the 8.20 train he might have to change at Stirling, to get on to Glasgow. For there were no explanations offered, and none could well be asked; and if there was some vague mention of Allan's further movements it was half-intimated and half-understood that these were in some way connected with young Caird and certain schemes of his. In truth the situation was altogether too embarrassing; this reunion, that promised so much, was found to be full of perplexity and chagrin; and at the earliest moment the two visitors withdrew—not a word having been said to solve the mystery.

. . .

And perhaps that was a long night for Jess—a long and wakeful night of thinking and tears; at all events, when she got up the next morning, she was in a languid and listless state; and more than once she looked at her little silver watch, that lay on the table. And then, as if moved by some sudden impulse, she began to dress quickly; and again she would look at the watch; and again she would go to the mirror, to see if those clear and gentle grey eyes bore less trace of the slow, immeasurable hours of pain. Finally, at a few minutes after eight, she issued forth from the house. It was a beautiful morning—the world all brisk and busy—the sunlight lying soft and golden on the slopes of Kerrara—the sea blue and shining far away out towards Lismore. She hurried along by the harbour-front; her eyes were alert, but no one she knew was visible; at length her glance happened to fall on the clock above the railway-station. And then her heart seemed to stand still, with sickness and fright. She pulled out her watch: it had played her false: at this very instant the train must be starting. She could not hasten her pace; a kind of paralysis of despair had come over her; and yet she struggled on, and eventually entered the station, only to be confronted by the wide and empty platform. She stood irresolute for a moment; then she hid her face with her hands; and crying and sobbing helplessly she would have sought some concealment by the side of the bookstall but

that the station-master chanced to have perceived her. He immediately came up.

"Bless me, Miss Jessie, what is the matter?" he exclaimed: for that Jess—the light-hearted, the laughing-eyed, the merry-tongued Jess—should be so completely broken down was a strange thing to him. And rose-red indeed was she before she would give him the remotest hint of an explanation.

"Well, I'm sure I am sorry for such an unfortunate mistake," said Mr. Gilmour. "I was wondering that none of you were along to say good-bye to Allan—none but Mr. McFadyen, and he was going on as far as Taynuilt. But if you would like to send a message, I could telegraph it through to Dalnally, and the guard would find him——"

"Oh, could you send a message to Allan, Mr. Gilmour?" Jess cried.

"Yes indeed——"

"And ask him to come back!—ask him to come back by the next train!——"

"Oh, yes, I can do that," said Mr. Gilmour, in kindly fashion. "But the message—it would have to be in your name, Miss Jessie—or he would not understand."

Jess, uncertain, distracted, confused—and with the conscious colour burning more clearly than ever in her face—hesitated, and yet only for a second.

"If you think that will be better—if you think he will understand, Mr. Gilmour," said she, shyly—and thereupon the good-natured station-master (perhaps with his own little guesses concerning this crisis) hurried away to the telegraph-office.

CHAPTER LII.

A SAIL.

ONE morning, some two or three weeks after these transactions, the steamer *Grenadier* was about to set out on its usual round of the western islands, when Mrs. Maclean, Jess, Allan Henderson, and the councillor came together along the quay, stepped in by the gangway, and took their places in a modest corner of the upper deck. This was a little entertainment that had been planned by the widow, probably as a mark of satisfaction over her daughter's betrothal ; it also coincided with the coming to an end of the schoolmaster's long period of idleness ; for in these few weeks he had made his final arrangements for resuming work.

They had waited for a fine day and they had got it—too fine, perchance, for there was promise of a blaze of heat as soon as the sun had dispersed the thin network of white cloud that stretched all across the heavens. At present this was a dreamlike world they were about to enter, with hardly any definite colour in it ; the sea, instead of showing its wind-driven northern blue, lay in long swathes of opalescent calm ; the hills, behind a tremulous veil of haze, were unsubstantial, and featureless, and remote. Nevertheless, Duntroone, with its spacious bay, its ivied castle at the point, its semi-circle of houses and terraced gardens, and its background of wooded hills, looked quite cheerful at this early hour. And soon, when the last passenger had been received on board, and when the hawsers had been cast off, the steamer slowly left the pier ; and by and bye, as those familiar aspects of the shore were gradually receding, the voyagers found themselves approaching that other and silent and mysterious phantom-universe, that seemed as yet hardly to have awakened out of the sleep of the night.

Now it was the widow who had suggested and even insisted on this little frolic ; but it was the councillor who must needs take the management of it ; and not only did

he do everything that was necessary for his own party, he was also able to come to the assistance of more than one group of English strangers, who gladly welcomed any information about Craigenure, and Loch Aline, and the Manse of Finnary. Before they had got half way up the Sound of Mull, Mr. McFadyen occupied quite a prominent position; he was asked the name of this, the name of that; and he greatly comforted two elderly maiden ladies, who had paid a visit to Tangiers the previous spring, by assuring them that there was no necessity for riding pickaback on going ashore at Staffa. Jessie's malicious grey eyes were demurely laughing, but she kept her thoughts to herself. Allan had fallen into an absent way of regarding this or that stranger with a gaze at once profound and abstracted; perhaps he was trying to read feature lines. The little widow was just as happy and content as she could be; she did not care to talk to anybody; the mountains, the woods and corries, and the increasing bursts of sunlight went by in a pleasant panoramic fashion; and more than once she blithely murmured to herself, "*The day is longer than the brae; we'll win to the top yet.*" And meanwhile Peter had established himself as the man of position and importance on this upper deck.

By the time they were nearing Tobermory, the sun had effectually cleared away the fleecy veil of cloud; and while they stopped at the quay, the heat pouring down into the circular little harbour almost began to equal that in the immediate neighbourhood of the scarlet funnels; but presently they were off and away again; and when they had come in sight of the wider spaces—from the mighty rampart of Ardnamurchan facing the Atlantic out to the long low-lying reefs of Coll and Tiree—there was an occasional and grateful stirring of wind—a stirring of wind that could be watched as it came creeping in silver breadths across the still, shining, azure plain. And then, far away, and one by one, the strange basaltic islands came into view—Carnaburg, Fladda, the Dutchman, and their lonely brethren; while nearer at hand, under the lofty cliffs of western Mull, lay the green-shored Ulva, and the darker Gometra, and the black rocks of Inch Kenneth. Pale and spectral those further isles appeared to be, and only half visible through

the quivering heat ; while they kept changing their forms, too, in an inexplicable fashion, as the steamer clove its way onward across this basking sea.

The Macleaus and Allan did not care to land at Staffa (the councillor, of course, did, to impart further information to those artless folk) ; they remained on board the steamer ; and when the captain had left the bridge, he came along to Allan, with whom he was acquainted ; and for a little while these two paced up and down the empty deck.

"And so you've made your choice at last, Jessie," said the little widow, "and I hope you'll not repent."

"I am not likely to do that, mother," Jess replied, very quietly, as her eye followed the schoolmaster's tall figure. "I know what the nature of that man is. I have seen him tried as few men have been tried ; and I know him—better than I do myself, I believe."

"Very well, then," rejoined the little widow, boldly, "I will say this now : if you are so finely satisfied, it would be but wise-like of you to keep a more civil tongue in your head. The poor lad !—doing everything to please you ; and any one can see he thinks there's just none in the world like you ; and yet you must go scoff-scoffing at him——"

"It's for his good, mother !" Jess cried—with the grey eyes beginning to laugh again. "Allan goes through his life in a kind of dream, and he must be wakened up now and again——"

"And I will tell you this as well, Jessie," the mother continued, with unusual warmth, "if you could see the difference in your own appearance since all this affair was settled—for happiness seems to agree with you, as it does with most people when it comes to them—and alters their looks too, and none for the worse—I say you would not put such a light value on what has happened to you, and risk it with that sharp tongue of yours. The poor lad !—he has not enough to say for himself. I think if he would take a stick to you, you would be all the better for it."

"Mother," said Jess, "that comes after marriage. You are in too great a hurry."

At this point Allan himself returned to them.

"The captain is asking if you would like to have the gig and a couple of the hands to row you into the cave."

"Me?" cried the widow. "Na, na! More than once I've been into that cave with the weather as smooth and as fine as this, and all the same the ground-swell was coming thundering in as if it would rive the very island in pieces. Na, na, Allan, lad, I am well content where I am."

"Jessie," said he, next, "would you like to try steering a steamer?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" she answered eagerly, jumping to her feet.

"Come along to the wheel, then."

And so Jess proceeded to try the strength of her arms on those stiff-revolving mahogany spokes, watching the stem of the great vessel slowly incline this way or the other—while far in the distance the people who had landed could be seen like small black ants making their way along the broken basaltic columns.

They did, however, land at Iona; for the Macleans had some friends on the island; and with them they spent the interval of waiting. Then they re-embarked and continued their voyage; and now the wandering breaths of wind had steadied into a light breeze from the south, so that the sea was of a deep sapphire as they passed between the red rocks lying off the Ross of Mull. All the southern ocean indeed was of the same vivid and troubled hue; and when at last they came in sight of Colonsay the distant line of land was a mere film of neutral tint beyond the solid and darkened mass of water. "Colonsay, ah, Colonsay!"—the piteous cry of the dying student came back to Allan's mind. And then again—"If only MacNeil had known Jess!"

But when they had got over towards Kerrara they entered once more upon a region of calms; and as they were steaming homewards through the Sound the water around them was like glass. Thus it was that they rapidly overtook a large schooner yacht that had been visible for some time, waiting helpless for any favouring puff of air. Very pretty she looked, with her tall spars, her breadth of cream-white canvas, and her booms lying out; and naturally she was an object of interest to those on board the steamer. Besides the red-capped crew there appeared to be only two people on deck, a young man who, as the *Grenadier* approached, kept his binocular glass almost constantly to

his eyes, and a young lady, dressed in a smart yachting costume, who now and again addressed a word to him. Then, as the steamer came up, he was seen to hand the binocular to his companion, while he himself took out his handkerchief and waved it to some one on board the passing vessel.

"Jess," said Allan, quickly and in considerable surprise, "that's Mr. Caird! He did not say he was to be here so soon——"

And that other—the young lady whose peaked cap of blue cloth displayed to advantage a shapely head of light brown and curly hair? Well, Allan did not recognise her. And yet—even in this rapid second or two of furtive scrutiny—there seemed to be something familiar?—surely he had seen somewhere before that slim, graceful, not over-tall figure?—the movement of her arm as she lowered and handed back the glasses had a strange suggestion in it—And then he knew.

It was Pauline.

THE END.

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